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The Master of Bonne Terre

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THE MASTER OF BONNE TERRE

BY

WILLIAM ANTONY KENNEDY,

AUTHOR OF

"AS BRITONS SEE IT," "THE MAKING OF PETER DUNN," ETC.

NEW YORK

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1917

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DEDICATION

THIS VOLUME IS DEDICATED TO MY WIFE, WHOSE SERVICES AND SOUND ADVICE, BASED ON HER KEEN APPRECIATION OF LITERATURE, HAVE MADE IT POSSIBLE FOR ME TO WRITE THIS STORY.

JUN -5 1917

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no. 1.

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The Master of Bonne Terre

THE MASTER OF BONNE TERRE

CHAPTER I.

A FUNERAL OF FIRE.

LEAPING flames lit up a strange funeral scene in the foot-hills of the Ozark Mountains. An assembled crowd of hunters and backwoodsmen stood in a wide circle about the roaring bonfire.

Two days before, an old couple, Paul François and Helen, his wife, had died almost at the same time. As they were passing out of the world, they requested that their age-shriveled bodies should be buried in one grave beneath the floor of the log cabin in which they had lived for over a quarter of a century, and that then the dwelling with all its contents be immediately burned to the ground. Friends were now doing as they had been commanded.

As the sun sank behind the smoke-crested hills, the simple ceremony was being conducted with great respect. By the time the last shovelful of earth was lovingly beaten into shape on the

mound, shadows of night were already enshrouding the dense forest that compassed the lonely spot. When the torch had been applied, and the red blazes were well under way, weird figures danced fantastically in the sylvan gloom. No rustle of leaves nor sigh of the wind muffled the sharp popping and crackling of the rich pine boards. Not a word was spoken. Every man, woman, and child gazed on in silence, struggling with thoughts that made them serious and sad. Occasionally an overwrought woman would look into the darkness of the woods and shudder. Even a hardy hunter feigned a cough now and then to ease the tension of his feelings. Still the fierce destroyer raged on, unmindful of the mourners, and caring naught whether the pile were a hut or a palace of kings.

Old Paul and his wife had been friends in need to the backwoodsmen in all the country round about. From far and near these rugged pioneers had come, with their families, to pay their respects to the dead of Bonne Terre. More than three hundred of them, the men clad in hunting jackets, and carrying rifles, and the women gowned in linsey-woolsey, watched the fire wipe out all earthly remembrances of those who had loved them and aided them in their battles for existence in that

new country. As the dry, rosined timbers fed the hungry flames, the onlookers' crude imaginations turned to Paul and Helen. With the roof caved in and the doors and windows burst outward, the interior could be plainly seen. In everyone's mind there reappeared the old couple sitting before the broad fireplace. As the ancient weight clock tumbled forward to mingle its ashes with the rest, they could again see Helen's wrinkled hand winding it up; when the cookstove tottered and fell on its side, they could see Helen standing by it baking johnnycakes; the old rifle, in dropping to the floor and writhing and twisting in the heat, reminded them of Paul's slipping softly through the primitive forests in search of game; and when the only picture on the walls, an enlarged photograph of Jean François, the one child of the household, crimped slowly and fell face downward, they saw the curly headed youngster playing under the oaks nearby, and remembered his mother's saying when he ran away at the age of fifteen, "Jean 'll come back some day and find us gone; but he is a good boy, and will yet make a man." And so on, until the stone chimney and the wide stone hearth were all that remained by the smoking mound of earth.

In the meantime, the blackness of a starless winter's night grew denser with the gathering of snow

clouds. The mourners still squatted upon logs and blocks of wood with their eyes fixed on the glowing embers and fire-crinkled ornaments and utensils. Their features were silhouetted in the waning fire light, and it seemed that they were afraid to speak or move, when Silas Dade, the backwoodsmen's leader, stepped forth and said :—

"Thar haint none of you'ns what knowed the deceased as I knowed 'em, and bein' as I was with 'em when they died, I can tell you how it was.

"Back thar somewhere 'bout forty years ago, I come here and entered my place down the hollow. One day soon after, Paul come with his wife, then a slight gal of eighteen, or thar 'bouts. Says he, 'Can I stop on dees half section ?' — he was French, you know, and always did talk funny. I said 'yes,' an' after a little talk and prancing about, he settled on this here place, an' 'lowed he'd stay. I asked them where they'ns come from, but says he, 'I don't see how it concerns you'ns.' So I dropped the question. None of you'ns ever knowed where they come from, an' I don't know neither.

"Yesterday I figured out some things he told me, or started to tell, and put them with what he told me 'bout ten years ago, when death snatched him hence, and when I've referred to Jean a bit, I'll

tell you what of it as is prudent, so you'll bear me out that I was right ten years ago when I took his part agin the whole passel of you'ns.

"Now, 'bout Jean. It seemed for the longest time that Paul an' Helen warn't goin' to have no children; but, howamsoiver, 'bout twenty-five year ago, Helen found a whoppin' boy, an' they'ns called him Jean. Old Paul was that proud of him, that he come dasted nigh takin' me into his confidence then an' a-tellin' me his whole goldarned secret — for long afore that him an' me was pals, and thicker'n dog fleas. By ginger, he did say, says 'e, 'I comes of a rattlin' good family, Si, and it's been my ambition to live far in the backwoods, or some distant part, so I could raise up a boy not to love money —' Then he bethought hisself, hooked up a stitch, and shut up like a domn'd terrapin.

"As to Jean, howamsoiver, much of which you knows. Jean grew up a husky, wide-awake, wild, devil-don't-care kind o' fellow. Seems as though his dad had rather soured on the world and forgot that once he was young, an' he and Jean didn't hitch nor gee and haw fittin' for nuthing. Then come that woman who called herself Theresa, and the all-but-would've-been scandal, an' somehow or 'nuther Jean and his dad mixed over it — Jean

was fifteen then, an' a chunk of a kid, and at the other end of the muddle, Jean cleared out on his own, an' he haint showed up since. He haint sent back no word neither. This has finished the old folks, 'cause it's been ten year now.

"Paul and Helen died together, as you'ns knows. Paul was aged before his time. Helen was, too, but she always did finicky about, so that when she saw Paul bound to die, she kind o' give up an' went, too.

"Paul figured this out, an' says 'e, 'Whin I draws my last, so will Helen.' Then he give me the instructions of this here burying, which Helen heard, though not pretendin' like, and it was too much for her, for the little flicker of her candle trembled a bit, then it petered out quick and sudden like. Paul seen it with his keen eyes, an' said, says 'e, in the words of some soldier whose name he called, —

'The Lord be praised, I die happy.'

Then friends, Death took old Paul by the hand immediately, and began to lead him over. Paul never put up no fight neither, — only smiled.

" 'Pears he must've thought of Jean, for he looked back from the edge of the dark river, and beckoned for me to come to his couch. I, the

only witness to that solemn moment, went and took his hand, an' he tried to leave a message for Jean an' you people he always loved.' Silas paused a moment, fumbled in his pocket, then continued rather brokenly, "Says 'e, 'Si, if Jean comes back, — ' then gasped awful; 'if Jean comes back, tell him to hold on to these here six hundred acres, an' not sell. You pay the taxes till he comes. Tell him to remember the squattin' oak, as I told him.

" 'Then to the people at my funeral say I was a rich man's son, high born, an' that I lived here to raise up a son — a real man, to avenge a wrong done me. I once protected a friend, an' he turned agin me. His name — his name was —' Paul strangled just here, an' I never got the name. Then, says he after a while, 'I'm leaving this world— give the people this word—' and he choked and come nigh going out before he could add, 'to clear up— to clear up— the—'

"I suppose he meant the charge we accused him of once, but his mind wandered, an' he clean forgot. Next he said— howamsoiver, with an effort, an awful effort, say 'e, 'Paul François—Paul Fr— haint my name. François was my mother's name. It's Paul Gr— Gr—'

"That was all I heard — just the startin' of a

name. He never did finish it. He just stopped breathin'."

Dade looked about from face to face, as though seeking encouragement that he might venture a guess to fill out Paul's secret and explain the mystery that clung about the life of the old Frenchman, thereby making good his half promise earlier in the discourses; but he thought better of it, and closed his remarks by saying : —

"You'll pardon me for not doin' as I said I would. If I tell you Paul warn't guilty ten year ago, you'll have to believe me as you did then, without the proof being p'inted out. I don't know Paul's real name, leastwise I'd tell you, but I can't see as how it makes any difference. He was a man, a real'n, too, an' I'm certain of one thing : he warn't guilty of nuthin' bad.

"They'ns is both dead now, an' Si Dade haint old woman enough to pry after things just to feed the curiosity of folks. It may all come out after while, for there's nuthin' hid what shan't be uncovered some day. Howamsoiver, I'm a friend of you'ns, a friend of the dead, an' a friend of Jean— if he ever comes back. So I'm goin' to shut up, an', in closin', I ask all of you'ns to keep silent to strangers about Paul an' Helen."

They promised after the manner of backwoodsmen; that is, by raising the right hand. Soon after they dispersed for home.

CHAPTER II.

TWO TRAVELERS.

In groups of twos and threes, the hunters and backwoodsmen, occupied with their own thoughts, scattered through the forest, or plodded along narrow snow-carpeted paths in the valleys and gulches. The only sound that broke the hush of nature at sleep, was the crunching of the snow under foot. The moon struggling to smile down on the ice-bound world, in its occasional peeps through the clouds, revealed rather the coming of another snow-fall, for heavy, murky banks hung low, and threatened in the west.

When one of the belated mourners came to the crossroads, two miles lower down the valley from Paul François's home, he was startled by the jingle of sleigh bells. He stepped to one side and awaited the approach of the travelers.

"Ah ! blast it, if there isn't a human being at last," said a voice from the sleigh.

Silas Dade seeing he was observed, stood still without speaking.

"Hello, there !" called out the larger of the two men in the sleigh, "can you, by any chance, tell us where we are at ?"

"Well," replied Dade, leisurely surveying with his sharp eyes which defied the darkness, first the horses, then the outfit and the travelers, "this here is the County of St. François, State of Missouri, nigh to the farm of old Paul François, what he hisself named Bonne Terre, 'cause, I reckon, it has a few lead diggings on it — can I obleege you'ns further ?"

"That's precise enough," remarked the other and younger man in the sleigh.

"And where be you goin', strangers, this late hour ?"

"To a superb region of perpetual and unmolested bliss, according to my young companion here," replied the first speaker, the big man.

"Well," said Dade, as measuredly as before, "whatamsoiver and whereamsoiver that place may be, you'ns haint arrived there yit. You're in the wrong county, fellers."

"By hooky !" exclaimed the big man, "we must be there, and no mistake; — but where the devil are we ? — probably at the wrong entrance of that paradise this young man's been describing to me."

"Didn't I tell yer where you've got — county,

state, and so on," continued Dade, on the verge of exasperation. "What else could I tell you, I ask myself ?"

"Right, right, my friend !" hastened to answer the big man, grinning the while; "we're not expecting you to tell us more than that, nor where we're going, but —" and he stopped short, stroking his beard. His companion laughed softly, then whistled.

Silas looked perplexed.

"We're looking for—, for—, that is, can you tell us the way to Silas Dade's ?"

"Dade's me name, sir."

The big man leaned forward to have a better view of Silas, then turned to his companion. "Well, Porter," said he, "this is what I call luck." Then turning again to Silas, he regarded him critically, but soon added with jocular enthusiasm, — "Hurrah ! but we're glad to know you, Dade. Why, man, we've been trailing you for hours, and here you stalk out on the roadside and gaze at us. Believe me, Dade, I'm that glad to see you, I'd divide my fortune with you rather than leave you tonight. My name is Donald Douglas."

"Donald Douglas — Douglas !" repeated Silas.

"You speak my name like you know me. Hands

up, I swear I've never been in these— what do you say ?"

"Diggings," suggested Dade.

"That's it— diggings;— I've never been in these diggings before, and unless you've been out of them, you've never seen me."

Dade, however, repeated the name mentally several times without reasoning out why he did so. Then he asked :

"How'd you git here?"

"We came down from De Soto to French Village, where I've been for a week at Uncle Frank AuBuchon's. I wanted to come out here to hunt for a couple of weeks. This young man is Abner Porter— I brought him along with me. He's useful to keep me in good spirits. Uncle Frank sent us over to you."

"Any fellers Uncle Frank AuBuchon sends me is welcomed. Both of you'ns can count on Si Dade."

"We'll get on—I can see that," added big Donald Douglas confidently.

"Yes," conceded Silas, "but how did you get here ?"

"Blast if I know. Ask this miracle worker, this young swain, who drives down faces of bluffs, and laughs, talks, and swears at the same time."

"This is a rather cold place to go into the details

of our adventures," said Porter, "but this is how it was : — Uncle Frank gave us some outlandish directions about a way through a settlement he called String Town, but we never got on to the 'string', and found out hours later that we were lost, in a settlement they call Shake Rag. One of the fellows there, a big, gruff man named Mostiller, put us right, but we had a hell of a time getting off Jacob's Creek. After we had crossed it some dozen times, we became frantic and struck out boldly in an opposite direction, to escape slipping and geehawing on its ice. Blame if in an hour's time we hadn't got back to it, and it was twice as large."

"That was Terre Blue," put in Dade.

"Well, 'blue' it may be," retorted Porter, "for both of us swore at it until we were blue. It seemed to be there just on purpose for us to cross and recross. By-damn, if we didn't come to the 'cussed' thing again with a half hour's time, and it was twice as large as it was thirty minutes before."

"That was Big River— I guess you crossed it at Pigg's Ford," suggested Dade. "You hadn't oughter blame pore old Jake — you left his crick over by Mann's Mill, at Hazel Run. Didn't you see the old feller what stutters an' hawhaws after everythin' he says ?"

"Yes," replied Porter, "and he said his name was, or we rather guessed it was Peter Mann."

"Well, you'ns have come mighty nigh right. Howamsoiver, you're here, an' that's somethin', weather like this. Just drive after me, an' we'll go down to the place where I live, what a feller from Fredericktown calls Dade's Inn, 'cause I takes in strangers, besides keepin' the post office an' a store, I reckon."

Dade led off at a brisk pace, and the tired horses followed close. The men in the sleigh spoke only twice in going the short distance, and that was to swear at being raked in the face by overhanging branches of the scrubby oak trees.

At last on emerging from a winding bit of the road, darkened by clumps of squatting cedars, they came up sharply in front of Dade's Inn, a building made of logs, — a large flat meandering building, with two huge stone chimneys rising from both ends of the main structure. Seven or eight yellow and black and white spotted hounds came yelping to the woodpile. But above the din of Towser and Buck and Lead and the rest, there came from the house strains of "Fisher's Hornpipe," being jigged out on a cracked fiddle.

An old woman stuck her head out the kitchen door and called : "Is that you, Pap ?"

"Yep, an' I've got two hungry fellers with me. Count 'em in the skillet."

"Supper's ready now— we'uns haint ate yet. Come in— Oh ! Jeems ! Jeems !— Tom !— go an' unhook the nags."

These instructions were screamed out by Mrs. Dade as she turned back into the kitchen.

James and Tom and Sam and Nick and Bud, — all big swarthy, grown up sons of Silas Dade, — came out to look shyly at the new-comers and feed the horses. They could have picked up the poor, tired animals, and carried them off to the barn, for they were splendid specimens of fully developed young manhood, unhampered by the city's depressing civilization. Douglas paused to look at them as they crossed the horse lot with the team.

The travelers long remembered the meal at Dade's Inn that night. Dade sat at the head of the table, — Mrs. Dade at the other end. The five grown sons sat along one side; Douglas and Porter, Miranda, Jennie, Sallie, and Sallie's 'feller', occupied the opposite one. A fourth daughter, Betty, waited on the table. Sallie's "feller"— he'd been courting her three years— was the butt for all the jokes. The pack of hounds, seven in number, reinforced by two awkward pups, sat on their haunches at respectful distances back of the diners'

chairs, with mouths dripping, waiting patiently for chance scraps of food.

It was a substantial supper, generously planned, and calculated to satisfy the hunger of men who had come far across rough country. Two huge roasts of venison, great dishes stalked high with corn dodgers, several bowls of potatoes, a tureen of lye hominy, plates of butter, large pitchers of butter-milk, piles of fried apple pies, and a two-gallon pot of black coffee, helped to appease the appetites of Douglas and his companion. However, their inner man, although full-fledged, seemed puny and inefficient when measured fairly with that of the family group; and Dade and his sons had had what they called just a "middlin' " day. Each had mauled two hundred rails in the clearing before attending "the funeral". Two helpings each of venison and three cups of coffee, with liberal portions of everything else, made them fairly comfortable. Douglas and Porter were so astounded by the eating prowess of the men that they forgot to watch the old woman and her daughters. Suddenly a break came, though, in the hearty laugh provoked by Mrs. Dade's exclamation :

"Why, Pap, you an' the boys haint leavin' nuthin' for the hounds !"

After the meal, they all went into the "sittin' " room— a big, square, low-ceiling affair, with ample space for dancing. At one side was a roaring fire of four-foot logs in a stone fireplace, seemingly wide enough to shelter an ordinary wagon.

A hit-and-miss rag carpet, that must have taken years to piece, covered the floor. The hewn log walls were white-washed, and the ceiling showed the bare joists with the upstairs floor of wide planks, also heavily coated with the backwoodsmen's domestic paint — a pearly-white preparation of lime, sour milk, and glue. A few pieces of heavy walnut furniture, — a bed, a bureau, and a chest, — occupied appropriate places. The ten or twelve chairs were homemade, with hickory bottoms. On the walls two chromo pictures, and a tall Seth Thomas weight clock on the broad mantel, completed the fittings of the assembly room of Dade's Inn.

That evening, the men folks brought out their cob pipes, and offered "terbacky" to the "company." Douglas and Porter preferred their own brands, but drew up their chairs before the fire and joined in the conversation, which turned easily from the weather and "rail splittin' " to deer hunting.

Silas Dade was one of the best hunters in the

Ozarks. He launched forth into his subject with master strokes, and soon had his guests transfixed in mute admiration as they followed him in their imaginations in deer-stalking from Ste. Genevieve to the mouth of the Merrimac. They gloried in his spunk when he recounted how he had carried the hind quarters of a buck from Pilot Knob, fifteen miles away, to the Inn. They admired his sportsman's compunction about shooting a doe with a fawn, and the next minute lived over again with him a hand-to-hand combat with a five-pointed monarch of the forests.

The sons knew these stories by heart, so one by one, they slipped off to bed. Young Porter also succumbed to weariness and retired. Mam and her daughters were waiting for a chance to tell Pap that if he wanted to "perlaver" later than eleven, he had better take Mr. Douglas through the store — one wing of the house — to his "den", when the seven hounds and the two pups gave mouth, in unison, as if they had discovered a fresh scent of reynard.

"Who's that now ?" cried the women folks as they rushed to the door.

On looking out, a gust of wind blew into the room a shower of snowflakes. In answer to Mam's

"Who's there ?" a deep bass voice asked, "Is this Dade's Inn ?"

"Yep," replied three of the girls in one voice.

Dade now advanced to the door and said :

"Come in — never mind the hounds. They haint of the bitin' kind."

Immediately, a large, broad-chested, black-bearded man strode into the room. He greeted the surprised group with a pleasant "Good evening — sorry to intrude upon you."

"Oh, that's all right," responded Dade while his keen, knowing eyes searched critically the man's face. After an awkward pause during which the new-comer stood still, Silas continued, "Git over to the hearth an' stomp off the snow balls from your heels."

The stranger obeyed at once. Crossing to the fireplace he brushed off the clinging snow from his Herculean shoulders and cleared his boot heels on the andirons. Then he removed his tall fur cap, revealing a high, prominent forehead about which clustered a mass of thick, curly black hair. He was handsome, with a manner dignified and compelling, and the easy flow of appropriate remarks that accompanied his actions, quickly dispersed any latent reserve on the part of his audience. He was liked by all.

"Come far ?" asked Dade.

"Walked from St. Mary's since yesterday — stopped overnight at William Carter's, in Farmington," the stranger replied.

"Good sixty mile," observed Dade.

Douglas was studying the fine face of the young man whose perfect ease of manner seemed to belie the suggestion that he might be a backwoodsman. He was undoubtedly young—surely under twenty-eight.

In the meantime, Jenny and Miranda had slipped away to the kitchen to get another supper ready. Mam who had followed her daughters, returned shortly and announced that the meal was served. The new guest followed her to the dining room.

When he returned to the sitting room, shyly escorted by the girls led by Mrs. Dade, his host called abruptly to his wife and daughters to go to bed, as he, Mr. Douglas, and the traveler were going to the den.

The women looked at the master a second time — disappointment lurking in their eyes at being dismissed so summarily — but obeyed without comment.

Dade took a lamp, and told the men to follow—

"We'll have a chat an' a 'drap' without disturbing the household," said he.

Leading the way through two wide halls to the room used as the store and post office, then through the latter into a somewhat smaller room, quite cozy, lighted up by a bright log fire, Silas paused on the threshold.

Douglas who was a few steps behind wheeled about to take another look at the store room before leaving it. That gave old Dade just the chance he was looking for. Quickly he turned to his companion and whispered :

"I know you, Jean François. Any reason to hide your name ?"

"None at all, Si."

Douglas came up at once, and Silas spoke as they entered the den.

"Mr. Douglas, this here's Jean François. He thought he'd have one on old Dade, but I've known him ever since he was knee high to a duck, so he couldn't fool me. He's been off on a jaunt, but he's got the right sort of blood in him an' knows what's what. Why, he was raised right here in these woods, an' I kin tell you that he kin draw as neat a bead as Dan Boone hisself. I allow he'll be after huntin' with you an' me."

"Pleased to meet you, Mr. François," and Douglas warmly shook the young giant's hand.

François acknowledged the introduction by bowing affably.

"We'uns have had a go 'round with this 'Misterin' ' business; 'spose we draps it an' say Si and Douglas and François—" pointing to the latter, "he's big 'nough an' whoppin' 'nough to be called François 'stid of Jean."

"Agreed," said Douglas with a hearty laugh, "Now, Si, bring that 'drap' you spoke of a while ago."

Silas chuckled, and going to an oak chest brought out a demijohn.

Douglas gave the old backwoodsman a friendly tap on the shoulder. "You're all right," he cried with an approving nod.

Drawing up a small table to the front of the fire, the three men seated themselves in eager anticipation of an old-time social hour. Now and then, it was the habit of Dade to slip away into this room, accompanied by a hunter or a traveler, his mind made up to take a drink or two beyond the equilibrium line; not through any weakening of his will power, but with the self-acknowledged idea of having a good time. No one dared interfere with him on these occasions, and although

good Mrs. Dade suspected what was going on, she never voiced her suspicions. It must be admitted, though, that Silas never strayed so far from the path of soberness as to cause any serious uneasiness to his helpmate. On this special night intuition had told Dade that Douglas was not aloof to a fling; and as for François — well, he could suit himself.

"If anyone needs a bracer, it sure is that lad," thought Silas. "When he sees that cinder-strewn grave —" The horror of it as it must appear to the son of Paul and Helen François checked the trend of his meditation. He looked gravely at Jean, and as the conviction of the latter's ignorance of recent events impressed itself more and more upon him, he shook his head sadly.

The click of the glasses as Silas laid his hand heavily upon the table, in an effort to regain control of himself, recalled him to a sense of his duties as host. Unmindful of the look which his companions gave him, he poured out three liberal portions, and surveying with pride the walls of his retreat, proceeded to make his guests acquainted with the history of the hunt trophies which decorated them. "Long John," his favorite long-barrelled gun, lay on its rack over the mantel. It required but a glimpse of it to make Silas become

eloquent over the recital of their mutual adventures. With it he had brought low the proud bearers of the four antlers that hung on the smoke-blackened panels of the den. Did he not also owe to "Long John" the beautiful bear skins which provided rugs for the floor ? — and was it not the same faithful friend who had dealt the death blow to the monstrous bull buffalo, whose head, with wild eyes and distended nostrils, hung on the rear wall ? Each Indian club and tomahawk dangling from wooden pegs in the hewn logs had a history of its own. As for the tripod of flint-locks, that was a relic of Colonel Clark's campaign, at Kaskaskia; the horse pistols and holsters were accouterments in Sam Houston's Texas struggles; the swords had come from France and done service in both countries — France and America, their original history dating back farther than Silas's memory could recall. By the time these reminiscences were marshalled before the minds of his audience, not forgetting the old swords and guns suspended over the oak chest — they had been found in a cave in the Ozarks — two more glasses of whiskey had been poured out and swallowed without anyone, not even François, taking account of them.

Silas noted with satisfaction, however, after

emptying his glass for the third time that Jean was not backward about keeping up with him and Douglas.

"Sufficient unto the day is —" but he checked himself in time, and to keep up the conversation he called on Paul's son to give a reckoning of his ten years' wanderings.

The young man readily consented. Flushed from the influence of liquor, like one unaccustomed to excesses and who is sensitive to its effects, he appeared to pay but little attention to the presence of a stranger and spoke freely of his reasons for leaving his home, — giving reasons that Silas had never quite understood until then.

"When I went away," he began with a wink at Dade, "I was only fifteen. As you know, for a long time my father had been goading me into it in more ways than one. The good soul, according to his way of thinking, meant well, as I know now, but I could only look upon his reproaches from the viewpoint of a husky, restless backwoods lad. Bitterly did I resent his nagging, that I 'would never make a man' to bring credit and honor on his name, in France. Therefore, the day I stole away through the dwarfed post-oaks of his beloved Bonne Terre, I resolved that I would never come back, or send a message, until I had made of

myself a man worthy of his regard. My idea at the time, of course, was that the only way to accomplish that end was to become a man of renowned fighting ability.

"I suppose I could easily realize my boyish dream, for I have developed into a strong, healthy man, with a body so massive that it scarcely knows its strength. But as I grew, I acquired a better insight into my father's meaning, thanks to a learned and good Franciscan priest in the far-off mountains of California, who educated me and gave me the priceless knowledge of another world. My father is a religious man, but, as you doubtless know, Uncle Silas, some past event in his life has cast on him a shadow, which even my mother's affection has never been able to dispel. I did not understand it at the time, — becoming restive under its spell, but experience has since taught me to be more tolerant of idiosyncrasies of this life.

"At times, I longed to return to my old home, but I realized that in this part of the country educational advantages are limited, so I tried to be patient and profit from the teachings of the Padre, who took such a deep interest in my welfare. I felt, moreover, with justifiable pride, that if I could earn a little gold, and return with the proof that I was able to support myself, and, if

need be, my father and mother, I might venture to stand before the door of the cabin, at the foot of Blue Hill up the valley yonder, my youthful resolve carried out.

"Apparently, the opportunity I was seeking came to me one day, in San Francisco, as I was strolling about the wharves. A sea captain, famed in that port, came to me and said he was looking about for a young man with a small capital to go in business with him.

"I had been giving lessons and my savings at the time were beginning to assume fair proportions. I listened to him in silence, fearful that the amount I had might not be sufficient for his purpose. His plan was this : with a little backing, he could collect a rich cargo in Chilean ports, sail round the Horn, then back to the States; the profits would be sufficient to start a young man well in life. I hesitated to mention my anxiety about being myself an applicant for the partnership. But as we conversed, we became gradually better acquainted, and overcoming my fears I spoke to him freely of my ambition. To my surprise, within a few minutes we had agreed upon putting our savings into a common pot, and a few days later, fully manned and provisioned, we

sailed out of the Golden Gate in our little brig, the 'Marietta'."

The young man had been speaking rapidly, Silas listening attentively, somewhat bewildered by François's volubility; at times finding it difficult to follow or get the exact significance of the remarks, — accustomed as the old man was to backwoodsmen's point of view and language. However, he was deeply interested, and all the while his hand rested near his glass, — forgetful of its proximity. Not so with Douglas. He listened with a certain amount of deference at first, then with an appearance of abstraction as he sipped the contents of his glass. While François, recounted how their cargo was stored in the holds of the vessel and how they cleared the Strait of Magellan and headed northward where they were overtaken by terrific storms which increased in violence until they reached their climax near the West Indies, the St. Louis man was so absorbed in his own thoughts that he seemed unaware of the presence of the men seated at the table. Unobserved, twice he replenished his glass. The account of the wrecking of the Marietta, told dramatically, failed to arouse him. Nor did he seem interested in the rescue of François, who with four sailors were the only ones saved— the brave captain and the rest

of his crew going down with the boat. Likewise he remained indifferent to the recital of Francois's landing in New Orleans — to his short but picturesque description of his first glimpse of the old southern city whither he was taken by his rescuers, — near the French Market, its cosmopolitan life tingling with color and animation; bustle, industry, and idleness in free and easy commingling; the frenzied activity of vendors contrasting with the leisurely attitudes of loungers at the *café* stands; representatives of nearly every degree of European civilization elbowing their way through the Latin population, ranging from the purest type of the race down through a series of various stages of adulteration to that of the darkest child of Africa.

Gradually François's voice lost its vibrant quality, and he concluded in subdued tones :

"From New Orleans I came up to St. Mary's by boat."

The fire of experienced-seasoned manhood shone in his eyes, but emotion fanned by the memories of his battles and the disappointment which attended his praiseworthy effort to win a fortune, caused a slight trembling of his lips.

"When I walked out on the gang-plank at St. Mary's," he continued, "I carried no gold. But

the desperate longing to see my mother was too strong. I gave in, and with increasing eagerness, I struggled through the deep snow to reach this spot. To-morrow, though empty-handed, I shall see my father and embrace my mother."

Dade fought down a lump which rose up in his throat. Then he turned his chair from the table and gazed into the fire. François had folded his arms and was leaning back, a set look in his eyes—repressed feeling taxing his self-control.

The fire no longer blazed brightly. The logs were reduced to that state where a slight shock would have sent myriads of sparks upward. Only the back-log of hickory emitted, at intervals, jets of blue flame, and Dade watched for their appearance and disappearance, seeking to distract his mind from the genuine sorrow he felt for his old friend's son.

During the silence that followed, the flames also attracted François's attention. But for him, they were the lodestar which drew his thoughts gently from the restless, disquieting past into the peaceful future. And he thought—of the next day's meeting and reunion.

A sudden collapse from the man they had forgotten for an hour or so, brought Dade and François to their feet in a second. The thought flashed

into their mind : "The fiery Kentucky liquor has been too much for him. He is no longer young and vigorous."

François supported him while Dade removed the demijohn and glasses. Presently, revived, Douglas motioned the young man away from him. François seated himself next to his old friend, and both studied intently the city man's face. Although affected by the liquor, it was evident that he was thinking deeply — in the grip of a thought that fought for expression. Once he swayed from side to side, then forward as if about to fall, and Dade started to his help, but he suddenly steadied and Dade reseated himself. For a man sixty-nine years of age, he was wonderfully preserved. His rather rugged and angular features, drawn and set in reflection fascinated his companions.

Liquor plays pranks with the most sedate of men, loosening tongues, firing brains, making demons of quiet spirits, — but also, at times, it awakens the heart in pathos and remorse. Douglas was under its spell. After a little struggling he delivered himself of what was on his mind.

"Y—you and your stho-ry, young man," he began, between hiccoughs, "reminds me— of— a sthory of a young man who did— me a great service in life. Be— be damned, after all, if I

could hold up, yes, hold up— my gray he-ad to-night, i- - f it hadn't been for hi -im.

"This was a likely Fr - ench lad, a - - couple of years ol-der than I, when he came to St. Louis and engaged to work for my father in his import and export business. His name was, Paul Grennard. He came from France. Hi - is father drove him off, too — because he did something — just some political caper, but it enraged Napoleon.

"Paul and I loved the same girl, and — and he gave her over to me. Da - - damn, it would have been better that neither of us loved Theresa !"

"Theresa !" repeated Dade frowning and narrowing his eyes.

"Theresa?" asked François. Then as he received no answer he looked again towards the fire.

There was silence for a minute.

"Ye - es, Theresa !" repeated Douglas vehemently.

The two men raised their heads simultaneously, —on the alert for some startling discovery,— but Douglas, after a few incoherent words lapsed into a tirade on domestic troubles, — in a general way.

Dade arose and assisted the old man to bed. He returned presently, and for a few minutes enter-

tained François with some inconsequential remarks, — clearly as a blind to avoid opening up a distasteful topic. François replied mechanically. He was busy with his own thoughts, and was quite relieved when Dade suggested they retire.

Far into the morning, both tossed on their pillows, each wondering if the story they had heard had really to do with the life of the old Master of Bonne Terre.

CHAPTER III.

THE NEW MASTER OF BONNE TERRE.

When Dade and two of his boys went to feed the horses and other stock at five o'clock the next morning, which early hour of rising is the custom in that country, François was still awake. The excitement in anticipation of meeting his parents, the possibilities in the mystery of his father's family in France, and the ever recurring review of the past, all united to drive sleep from him. He did not hesitate, therefore, to get up, but fairly bounded into his clothes to hail with gladness the new day. What a pity shadows must soon fall! — a shock of sorrow within an hour was destined to wipe out the cherished dreams of a decade! awakening in him a sense of his loneliness in the world!

After completing his toilet by carefully brushing his hair and beard, he went to the window and looked up the valley towards Blue Hill, where his father's estate, Bonne Terre, spread over three

spurs of the Ozarks. The snow storm was over. The unbroken coverlet of white, Elvin's Hill to Boyer's Point, lay before him sparkling even in the dim light of dawn. Its thick sheets weighted down the cedars outside in the glade. The gate posts wore high-pointed caps; long, glittering bands of fluffy flakes clung to the weather side of the trees; and the spring branch which ordinarily bubbled noisily down the rocky gulch, was quite choked with the downy mass. François's heart swelled with pride as he viewed this beautiful panorama, and his breast heaved with emotion as he vowed never to live elsewhere in the wide world, save in those hills that he had known in boyhood, those hills where God is, and where men live close to nature's sweet and gentle influence.

Thus permitting his eyes to wander lovingly over the familiar landscape, he began to locate the homes of the old neighbors by following the long blue columns of smoke that ascended from the chimneys. This, at first, was a subconscious act of his mind. But very soon he took a lively interest in the search. Off to the right, where a cluster of feathery wreaths floated lightly in the high dome of the heavens, lived Jake Robins; higher up, Pete Smith—there was Dick Flynn's also; and Abe Conrad's over yonder; Adrien Val-

lé's here; Ed Buchard's there. This new pleasure soon took complete possession of him. Immediately that he began to recognize the places, he naturally enough strained his vision to find the curling column from Paul and Helen François's chimney. He went over the ground carefully several times, murmuring that he should certainly be able to see his own home. However, a tiny streak of smoke might be invisible at a distance of two miles. Still, he kept on trying to locate the small log house by this and that landmark.

"Yes, yes," he said after fixing upon the spot, "it should be just there, at the base of old Blue Hill. I can't see it—perhaps the light is not right. Oh! I know why I can't see Pap's smoke now. Pap and Mam are older than when I went away—they don't get up as early as they used to do when I was at home."

This joyous explanation was about to suffer a disquieting blow as a result of his own added comment, "But the others still get up early," when Dade called loudly:

"Come down! come down to breakfus—we'uns don't lie abed of mornings in these here hills. You, François! you had oughter know better. Git right down here, all of you'ns."

François answered promptly: "I'm coming, Uncle Silas."

There was a general rumbling in all parts of the house as the family started to mobilize.

Even the hounds gave deafening yelps at the prospect of the beginning of their festivities.

François's identity was not yet known to the household. Dade whispered a few words in Mam's ear, which caused her to start and catch her breath in excitement. She did not speak to her daughters, and they, being ignorant of the guest's name, continued to be shy and exceedingly reserved.

Just as the men and Dade seated themselves about the table, an interruption was caused by one of the hound's turning over a jar of cream. When the worst of the hurrah had subsided, François took advantage of the moment of distraction to scrutinize Donald Douglas.

The old city chap sat on the other side of the room from François—so it seemed from the width of the structure covered with eatables. François had met dozens of this type of fat man in his travels. They were all good-natured, more voluptuous than ordinary men, and always attracted more attention. Douglas's excess, the night before, taking him off guard and loosing his tongue to tell a story of special interest, made him the

subject of inquiry. François liked him, but while everyone listened to Mrs. Dade who was scolding the poor crouching hound, he tried to read the big man through and through. First of all, Douglas impressed him as a mass of solid, heavy human flesh. Then he searched the pleasant, large face—it was double-chinned, awry at the corners of the mouth, and angularly pitched from the front view. The red skin, bespattered with small broken surface veins, was visible beneath the covering of waving beard. His ears lay flat against his head. The lower lip was a trifle thicker than the upper—the deacon of the kirk variety. Nose and cheek bone seemed offended at this defect, and drooped sharply toward the wide straight mouth. But the result was the typical, smiling Scotch face. The light blue eyes—one decidedly squinted—were there, too. At these orbs of merriment and information, François's quest came to a halt. He did not like their nervous, darting motions. He altered his opinion somewhat—believed Douglas weak, possibly a sufferer from a hidden fault. Heeding the clue from Douglas's eyes, he ran his gaze swiftly over the man before, as if to justify a fair judgment by giving proportions and ampleness a chance. The conclusion amounted to pigeonholing

the records for the future, labelled: "Excellent company, but tricky and will bear watching."

Dade observed François's secret sizing-up of Douglas, and followed his example. The processes of his mind in analyzing the Scotch-American were totally different from those used by François, but the backwoodsman formed his judgment first. "By cracky!" he whispered to himself, "that's a fellow you'll like, 'though he's liable as not to steal your horse and kiss your wife when you're not lookin'!"

Then Silas fell to wondering whether or not Paul François and the Paul Grennard of Douglas's story had any connection—might be the same, as indicated by their mutual acquaintance with one Theresa.

Immediately after breakfast, Douglas and Porter occupied themselves with two of the young Dades in planning the day's hunt. Silas had already excused himself and François from participation in the chase for that day. Therefore, they were counted out. Dade had a difficult duty to perform, and was anxious to see the party off. He felt more at ease when he and François wished the men with the guns and hounds good luck and a safe return. While shrinking from the ordeal ahead of him, old Silas would not willingly have relinquished the task to another. Had not Paul, when

dying, given him a sort of guardianship over Jean? He had always been rather flattered by old Paul's friendship, and this last trust gave him a sense of importance that raised him in his own estimation.

The old white-haired, backwoods innkeeper and the new Master of Bonne Terre stood at the front gate for several minutes, following the movements of the hunters as they toiled along the steep hillside through the snow. They watched also the other boys as they wound their way with axes and mauls to the clearing. Preparatory to leaving, François turned, and noted on the kindly face of his old friend, a troubled, far-away expression. He was taken aback, but dared not speak as he was ignorant of the cause of this change. Dade gave a sudden start and grasped François's arm:

"Come to my room," he said, in a tone that struggled to sound calm. "Perhaps I hadn't oughter have kept things from you so long, but I just couldn't afore now."

This surprising announcement of forthcoming bad news almost stupefied François. He stood motionless and stared at Dade. The reaction was quick. Quite automatically, while he searched Dade's very soul for an explanation, his brain gave the clew, — something whispered in his ear: "There was no smoke from Bonne Terre's chimney

this morning!" The big, muscular François, with rigid limbs and bowed head followed Dade towards the room where he had spent the previous evening in such high spirits.

As they seated themselves once more about the small table, François said in a husky voice:

"Uncle Si, why didn't you tell me last night?"

"I just couldn't!"

"But had I known, I wouldn't—"

"Yes, yes; I know, but I hadn't no thought besides taking a couple of drinks—to brace up, an' then I 'tended to tell you, but you saw for yourself how it was. 'He' was there, so we had to keep up an' talk, an' have more drinks—that's how 'tis—one always leads to another, an' two drinks to more 'n double."

"Speak, Uncle Si, it is crushing me. Tell me the worse."

"It's bad of me, I know, but I allowed it was for the best," still urged Dade, unwilling to begin,—racking his brain for an excuse to postpone the blow a little longer— "You see 't wasn't my—"

"Mother's gone," cried François. "I feel it."

"Yes, Jean."

"And father is—alone. I must go to him at once."

"No, Jean, he's gone, too."

"Oh, Uncle Si!"

François arose quietly and stood before the fire. He covered his face with his hands and trembled. His frame shook violently as he grappled with a grief that stifled him, that reduced his strength to that of a child. For a while he suffered with the heavy, difficult giving in of a strong man. For full ten minutes Dade watched him in silence, then as he saw the reaction set in he left the room, and returned in a moment with his great coat and cap on. Handing François his out-door wraps, he said simply:

"Come."

In silence the two men left the house and started off up the valley towards Blue Hill. Dade walked ahead, picking his way through the snow. François followed a few paces behind, his head still bowed, his face quite drawn and pale.

Just once did he say anything:

"When, Si?"

"Three days ago—buried yesterday."

A tightening of the lips to repress a groan was the only visible effect of the answer as the son trudged on and on until he and Dade neared the spot where the cabin once stood. Wonder, emotion, and grief blanched the young man's features, and he glanced questioningly at Silas who had

stopped and reverently removed his cap. The backwoodsman's attitude enlightened him. François's lips quivered and he did not seek to hide the tears that trickled and dropped on the mound at his feet. The desolation of the place made him sick at heart.

Still, in contrast to the day before,—Silas noted it thankfully—Nature had undertaken to conceal from the sorrowstricken son the full horror which the charred remains of his old home would have called forth, by spreading over the whole scene, her mantle of spotless white. Only the sides of the chimney, blackened by the funeral pile, had refused to lend themselves to the scheme, and the tall massive structure stood outlined, grim and defiant, against the surroundings, — just as old Paul would have had it.

François finally spoke:

"Poor Dad! he carried out his threat,—but where is mother's grave?"

"Both here, Jean."

François crossed himself, and fell on his knees, calling touchingly and insistently on his mother. He wept freely until the fullness of his grief was spent. Then burying his face in the snow, as though he were resting it in his mother's lap, he

lay still and silent over the ash-strewn grave, oblivious of the world.

For a good half hour he remained thus, then Silas who had withdrawn beyond the large oaks which grew at some distance from the house that had been, came back and helped him to his feet.

"Come," said he again, in a gentle voice. You're no longer a boy, Jean. You're used to this here cold world. I'll tell you more about it later. All I'll say now is that your good old pap an' mam died peaceful like. You'd forgotten they was old even when you left. I was there when they'ns went, an' everythin' was done as old Paul told me. Come! you'll have to stand it. You're the new boss of Bonne Terre, an' you'll have to look after it,—'t was your pap's wish. At present, my home's your home. You'll git the san' under your feet again."

The good old fellow grasped François's arm firmly and led him down the hill.

CHAPTER IV.

RE-INSTATEMENT.

BACKWOODSMEN are just as exclusive in their associations as any social circle in London or Paris, although the requirements for fellowship in the hills are vastly different. It is more difficult to be admitted into confidential relations with the Ozark backwoodsmen than it is to "get into society" in a most select metropolitan set. Money is not the chief asset in those Missourian hills. In order to live unmolested, and enjoy their clear, pure air, one must be absolutely free from suspicion, simple in dress and habits, in sympathy with backwoods life, and—a good shot. Also a man is preëminently better off who stands six feet high in his socks and is abundantly blessed with muscle and brawn.

François possessed the advantage of having been born in those parts, and the commendation of his father on his death-bed had secured him an invaluable friend in Silas Dade. But in spite of all this, he had endangered his birthright by an absence of ten years. Moreover, the cloud which

hung over Paul's early life, had grown somewhat darker through the smoke of that strange funeral of fire. It is true that the backwoodsmen had all been friendly to Paul and Helen,—there was always so much in common in their lives,—and despite the old Frenchman's queer ways, he and his wife had been friends in need to the whole country round about. These people were bound to respect the secret of such generous and devoted neighbors, but in their opinion,—so long as they kept it from strangers,—it did not preclude the right of discussing the nature of that secret in the family circle. Besides, the promise given to Silas, on the evening of the funeral, was given under the stress of strong emotion, and did not in any way refer to Paul's son, whose unexpected return awakened all their dormant curiosity.

Nearly all these simple people remembered a curlyheaded youngster, and in his stead they were confronted by a large, tall black-bearded man in whom they vainly looked for the youth of fifteen.

So, when the novelty of Jean's return wore off, the old-timers said among themselves: "Jean François haint much like his pap, an' he haint 'zactly one of us. He 'pears to be edercated; furthermore, he don't go to our church."

In a short time many indications to the exis-

tence of "feeling" against François became obvious to Dade. He warned his young friend, but the other laughed and replied that he did not give serious thought to the matter. "At any rate," muttered Dade, "you have muscle enough to command respect."

François shrugged his shoulders.

Dade spoke up plainly:

"They'ns don't take you for what you are—I haint afeerd you can't take keer of yourself—but you might run the risk of foul play. Just be keerful and don't flinch."

The Dade boys, although quiet and law-abiding, ruled the neighborhood by sheer force of fists. Each of the five young giants had won his "spurs" by "licking" some would-be bully. They were staunch believers in François and when some spoke slightingly of him in their presence they warned the backwoodsmen, saying:

"François haint to be tinkered with—he kin lick the whole passel of you'ns."

As time went on, the slumbering distrust of François became more pronounced. The people watched his every move that they might find a justifiable excuse for ostracizing him publicly and thereby forcing him to sell Bonne Terre and leave. But he never gave them a chance. He dressed as

they did, and was quite fair in matters of royalties on the lead he permitted them to take out of his pocket mines. He attended all their public meetings with apparent indifference to the risks he ran. At the shooting matches, no man drew a neater bead than François. In hunting he carried off highest honors. At the annual gathering of strong men, held on Elvin's Hill, soon after his return, he easily won over all competitors.

Shortly after François went to live with the Dades, it was murmured that the mysterious son of queer old Paul was sheltering himself under the wings of the five young giants. Silas wanted to tell Jean then of this reflection on his courage, but hesitated lest he wound the young man's feelings. At all events the step was unnecessary. François had absorbed those rumors from the air, as it were, and quietly went to work and built a log house near where his father's had stood. Then he went to live in it alone.

This move was criticized. That is to say the house was made the subject of comments. "It's the same queer way," folks said. "Paul never did have no outhouses of any kind,—no smokehouse, no henhouse, no barn;—an' he never owned no stock of any sort. It's funny, haint it?"

When all other avenues for fault-finding seemed

to be closed, the people hit upon something which was capable of more possibilities. This is how it began: François had labored for several weeks building a stone wall about the foundation of the old house, that he might protect the grave of his father and mother. When it was finished, he got a man to come and carve the names and usual inscriptions in the arch stone of the chimney that was left standing. The people said, at first, that it was perpetuating the memory of those who had wished to be forgotten. Later they began to whisper about ghosts and flames that appeared above the walled-in graves. Some went so far as to state that these weird specters "hanted" Jean's house and were heard to converse with him at night.

Dade laughed at these silly people. Seeing that they persisted in spreading those rumors, he decided to speak to them, "You seem to forgit how kind old Paul was to you'ns. There haint nary of you'ns what cried at his'n and Helen's funeral. An' when I asked you for a pledge, you stuck up your paws like monkeys, yes, like monkeys. Git out! the whole lot of you. You'ns haint afeerd of hants nohow, an' if some of your old wimin is, you sure haint pertending to think that old Paul an' Helen would tech one of you'ns to harm you.

Who was always the furst to go to you when you'ns was taken bad? Warn't it pore old Helen?

"No, taint that, the truth is you don't like Jean. Well, if you don't, you don't; but be men about it. Bide your time an' be keerful you don't 'fend him unjustly or I tell you, he'll lick every one of you like a passel of school kids."

After this, most of them were really ashamed, and for a time, went quietly about their business.

For many years there had been two factions among the hunters and backwoodsmen that lived in the vicinity of Bonne Terre. One was led by Dade and his boys; the other, by a stalwart farmer, originally from Virginia, named Frank Bardsdell. At one time the differences that accumulated from year to year had almost precipitated a fight with rifles, Kentucky feud style, when the Dade boys, in a fist and club encounter, triumphed over Bardsdell, his two sons, and four others of their gang. By tacit consent, this was accounted a settling of the difficulties, and gave the championship to the Dades,—the "hill" code of ethics, or rules of honor, compelling everyone to acquiesce and forget bygones. Dade was a "son of the sod," highly respected, and the same applied to most of the opposing faction. Indeed, no fault could be found with Bardsdell, who came of good Virginia stock,

and, who, though blessed with money and broad acres, lived among them in real backwoods style. Other men in his faction were entitled to claim their rights as lawful citizens of good repute.

Of course, bygones were bygones, but there was no guaranty that new offenses might not again draw party lines. If such should again be the case, old memories would be resurrected to embitter the impasse.

Of Bardsdell's sons, Joe towered above his father. The faction, therefore, transferred its allegiance to the younger man. Also, in the Dade faction, Bud Dade stole his father's popularity as leader, and began to take first place in the management of affairs in the neighborhood.

The Bardsdells lived east of Dade's Inn, about three miles, as the crow flies.

There was a whisper going the rounds that a new contest was approaching between Joe Bardsdell and Bud Dade.

When François appeared on the scene, both sides shared more or less in the criticisms against him, so that he was equally in danger of clashing with either.

Besides pocket mining in Bonne Terre, the farmers raised cattle for sale in the St. Louis market, to provide cash for home purchases. The cattle

were grown by "turning them out to range," as it was called there, which meant that the cows and calves were turned out and permitted to roam over the hills and fatten on wild grasses. Each farmer identified his cattle by means of ear-marks, or holes, forks, crops, and slits cut in the calves' ears at weaning time. Hogs and sheep were marked in the same manner. Therefore, one man would refer to his cattle as "a slit in the right and a crop off the left;" another's would be "a slit in the right and an under-bit in the left;" etc. In the fall of the year, men would go to the forests and drive the cattle home. Buyers would then come along and purchase the fat ones for the market, driving them off to St. Louis in great herds.

The first fall after François's return in winter, Donald Douglas came again to hunt. He had made many friends on his previous visit and had become much impressed with the country, so Dade was not surprised to see him again. On this trip, he was accompanied by his son, Daniel, the only child of his marriage with Theresa. One evening, as François and the two Douglases were returning from a day's shooting, they stopped at Dade's Inn.

François was often seen in the older Douglas's company. At first, Dade wondered at it. The recollection of the old man's recital of "remin-

iscences" on a certain night, which amounted to a confession of guilt, had not faded from his memory, and he watched with great interest the course François had adopted towards the St. Louis man. Was he "bidin' his time?" Well, he, Dade, was not going to interfere. Jean was old enough and big and strong enough to look after himself. Paul's old friend lulled his troubled conscience to sleep with the plea that the story might be attributed to the "more 'n two glasses," which Douglas had imbibed. He found it difficult, in broad daylight, to associate disgrace with such a genial countenance. Still, the name of Douglas's benefactor and savior coincided strangely with the name that Paul's dying lips had tried to pronounce. At times, Silas was on the point of discussing the matter with François, but he could never quite make up his mind about it,—Douglas was so pleasant. Not only Silas, but all that came under his influence felt a great attraction for the big city man, who, in spite of his advanced years, had such fresh, jolly ways.

But, was Dade right? Was François "biding" his time? Douglas's story, although mumbled and confused, had made an impression on him. He had not questioned it nor the narrator on that "special night," because he thought that sooner or

later he would get the truth from his father. But now, since Paul François was dead, how could the son clear the mystery that had clouded and embittered his father's life? Douglas would not willingly refer to the matter again, and Jean might not question him without arousing his suspicions. He would have to wait for Douglas to commit himself a second time. With that end in view, he accepted all the invitations tendered him by the Dade boys to join them and Douglas in hunting, meaning all the while to use every minute for studying the old man. Naturally, the pleasures of the chase shared together drew them nearer, and the intensity of his purpose waned as he began to enjoy more and more the elder man's company. The transition was gradual,—it followed several disappointing attempts to turn Douglas's conversation to episodes of his younger days when he might inadvertently throw a clearer light on his previous disclosure. The old man's charm of manner was irresistible, and imperceptibly François succumbed. After all, he argued frequently with himself, what proof had he that his father was the hero of Douglas's story? Silas had never discussed with him the probabilities of the case. Now, with the coming of the younger Douglas, conversation drifted in other channels and Fran-

çois allowed himself to drift along pleasantly in company more or less congenial.

On this particular evening, the two Douglases and François found the Dades in a fever of excitement. One of the Bardsdell's hired men had just delivered a message, in the form of an ultimatum, to Silas Dade. Mr. Bardsdell informed Mr. Dade, that the latter had sold the week before to Birch Morrison, the cattle buyer, three red cows belonging to the Bardsdell herd; Mr. Dade was to call at once, and pay Mr. Bardsdell the sum of one hundred and fifty dollars, this amount being the fair market value of the cows.

An indignant reply was sent back to Bardsdell, to the effect that the Dades had sold only their own cattle; that Mr. Dade and his sons were not cattle thieves; and that the charge must be cleared up at once and proper apologies made.

After reciting to François and his companions the main facts, Bud Dade added:

"We'uns, Dad an' me, haint never been 'cused of stealin' afore this, an' Joe Bardsdell an' his dad 'll rue this day. We'uns licked the whole bunch of 'em once over election disputes, but that haint a patchin' to what they'ns 'll git this time. Me name haint Bud Dade if I don't mash all their noses in a jiffy. They'ns must 'pologize afore sun-

down tomorry, or by gosh, we'uns 'll be on 'em like wild cats!"

Bud Dade's threat was not made in blatant, high-handed braggadocio, but in grim, measured, earnest tones that meant fight. François listened in silence. The elder Douglas gave a low, disquieting whistle. Dan, a handsome, dashing city young man of twenty-two, said : "You're right, Bud. Go at them with tooth and nail."

Before going, and after taking leave of the Dades and the Douglases who made their headquarters at the Inn, François turned to Bud and said:

"Be careful what you do."

The next day, instead of an apology, the constable came over and arrested Silas Dade and his son, Bud, on the charge of stealing from Frank Bardsdell three cows marked with holes in their right ears, said cows being of the market value of one hundred and fifty dollars.

While the five boys were cleaning and loading their rifles, out on the porch,—hot-headed Dan having taken Bud's place,—François was seen passing the gate on his way home and called in. Amid great excitement he was told of the happenings of the day. One vied with the other in cursing the Bardsdells and the Bardsdell faction. All

swore that they were going over immediately to shoot the lot of them,—all they were waiting for was for Pap and Bud to get back from giving bond, when they would go over in a body, armed to the teeth. What was François going to do? they inquired with one voice, expecting of course that he would join them.

François sat down on the step and said quietly:

"I'm going to wait until Uncle Si and Bud return."

In a few minutes, Silas and Bud came up riding at full gallop. They, also, were excited to the point of joining in the most desperate expedition.

"Think of it!" began Silas at once, addressing François and the group at the door, "I've lived in these here hills nigh on to seventy years, an' my father come here from Car'liny when St. Louy was a village. Now I'm 'cused of stealin'! Think of it! By damn! they'ns 'll pay for it with blood, this very day. Hear me, boys?"

"We'uns is with you, Pap," cried the boys, in one breath.

Bud sat on his horse, grinding his teeth together in black rage. Words failed him, and on his face was written revenge to the last drop of blood, the revenge that drives a man to seek out his enemy and tear him limb from limb.

Silas began anew:

"Think of it! The constable says Bardsdell says, says he: 'I hate to do it, but Birch Morrison's two drivers know my marks an' swears the cows are mine.' Hates to do it! eh!—hates like hell! It's to git even. He also says old Nan Simpson 'll swear she saw me an' Bud drivin' 'em home from Turkey Holler. Saw me an' Bud!—Me name's not Dade if I don't clean out the whole kit of 'em afore this day ends. The perliminary trial is set at Squire Moore's next Thursday at ten,—to-day coming week. Ha! ha! By damn, there haint going to be no trial!—'cause there won't be no 'cusers an' witnesses. What you say, boys? Haint I right?"

"We'uns is with you, Dad."

Had François or anyone in the crowd remonstrated, the fury of the Dades would have swept them out of their path. But the general acquiescence,—although François had not committed himself as yet,—had a soothing effect on the general wrath,—especially on Silas's. He turned to the young man:

"What do you say?" he spoke in calmer tones.

Tom interposed:

"We'uns done asked him that, but—" then he

asked roughly: "Why don't you speak out? Haint you one of us?"

While all eyes were turned upon François, he deliberately stooped down and picked up a small bit of pine that lay on the boards near his feet, and after examining it most carefully, began whittling it. This insignificant act, so coolly done in the midst of such excitement, held the attention of those about him. He continued whittling in silence, as if greatly interested in the proceeding, to all appearances, unconscious of being spoken to. Tom shook himself impatiently, but Dade placed a restraining hand upon his arm. The older man understood that François was carefully weighing the case before speaking. Bud grew impatient and indicated it by a grunt. The others waited in silence looking from their father to François, surprised at his sudden calmness which he seemed to have absorbed from the younger man's.

"Well, Uncle Si," said François at last, "I've been away from these parts too long to dare give you advice. All I can do is to express my opinion. Even in this case, I could not induce myself to speak out but for the fact that you were my father's friend,—his best friend."

There was a slight shuffling of feet as the listen-

ers changed their positions, — drawing a little nearer François.

"You and Bud stand before this community accused of a crime. The question is this: If you ride over to Bardsdell this afternoon and shoot him and his followers, will you prove yourselves innocent? Will that act clear you before the world? Or, will it not add murder to the existing charge? For this last the law is bound to punish you, and if you escape its penalty, you can only do so by retreating into the wilderness and hiding there for the remainder of your lives,—you and your sons. As it is, you are not guilty. Therefore, the proper thing to do is to prove beyond a doubt that you did not steal the cows, and by doing so you get the upper hand on Bardsdell who must ever afterwards suffer the humiliation of having been in the wrong."

For five minutes all remained silent. François's "opinion," was in reality such good advice that it came very near having the desired effect.

Dade, who, as a rule, was inclined to look at things soberly, asked:

"Then it's your advice to let the law take its course?"

"Yes," replied François firmly.

"Well," said Dade, "perhaps you're—"

Before the old man could say another word, Bud, who had dismounted his horse, pushed himself into the circle. His countenance was as dark and sullen as an Indian warrior's, and he glared savagely at François:

"I want to tell you, Jean François, that your advice,—or opinion,—haint going to influence me —if the others—" anger cut his speech short. Dade spoke up quickly:

"Boys," said he, "I'm beginnin' to think seriously that François is right. We must clear ourselves first of all of the charge that rests on our name, then—"

"Then," interrupted François, "if you really think you must, Bud an' the boys, and you and I can go over without rifles and lick the Bardsdells and their faction 'hill style.' Smashed noses and broken heads do not make one guilty of murder. Furthermore, it has always been the custom, here, to avenge wrongs with the fists and not with weapons. Over in the Ozarks proper, some do shoot, and from ambush, too, but as you know, they are moonshiners, not backwoodsmen."

This last speech cleared the horizon of honor and was cheered lustily. Bud was last to give in. A feeling of distrust gave a nasty sting to his words:

"François, I'll do like the rest, but I want you to know that I haint hankerin' after jaw from a feller like you,—who's edercated so that he must think different from us an'—isn't one of us nohow!"

The insinuation cut Jean to the quick, but he answered:

"That's what I hear some say, Bud, but I was born in these hills, and I'm going to be one of the backwoodsmen just the same."

"I guess you'll have to consult me," and Dade's oldest son drew himself up to his full height and glowered at the intruder.

This time François returned Bud's stare, and as he turned from him to speak to Donald Douglas who was calling to him from the front gate, he felt that sooner or later he would have to reckon with Bud Dade.

Since coming back into the Ozark Hills, François had acquired a genuine attachment for the people. He was passionately fond of hunting, of hunting alone, and, in roaming through the forests for miles in every direction, he soon renewed his boyhood's love for the countryside with its springs, its brooks, and the patches of clear blue sky that peeped from the clouds above it. While standing on the brow of Dry Bones, a majestic hill four

miles from Bonne Terre, on a surpassingly clear day, his heart swelled with pride as he beheld the landscape spreading out before him,—the tree-clad ridges with here and there bald spots of rock, overlooking scattered groups of farms with various sized fields of ripening grain; the deep, tortuous stream, known as Big River, winding in and out, its crystal pools and swift currents bordered by high, picturesque bluffs,—and he vowed he would live for the people and the land of his birth.

Consequently, the Bardsdell-Dade rupture caused him much anxiety. For three days he hunted continuously, alone, that in the quiet of the hills he might think out some plan or find some effective means of averting the serious trouble near at hand. He realized that he had calmed his friends only momentarily. Should the Dades fail to establish their innocence conclusively, on Thursday next, their fury would break all bounds. Even before then, a chance meeting of any of the Bardsdells and Bud might bring about serious results. Of course, the Dades knew nothing of the missing cows, but how prove it to the already-prejudiced accusers? No way occurred to François. The more he puzzled over the situation, the gloomier grew the prospect. Was there no one he could appeal to? no one who could intervene? His

heart sank when he thought that the peace of the backwoods would be broken up for years to come.

With these reflections uppermost in his mind, François was fighting his way through the dense undergrowth at Pigg's Ford, when his attention was attracted by the noise of splashing water. He peered cautiously through the branches just as Virginia Bardsdell, on a large black horse, rode out of the stream. A plan came to Jean's mind at once. This was surely the way out of the trouble. Why not persuade Virginia to intercede for peace? Surely when told of the impending trial, with its direful consequences, her sympathies would be enlisted in the cause he had so much at heart. Although he had never seen the girl before he never doubted but that she was Frank Bardsdell's daughter, whose extraordinary beauty, of a type, rarely, if ever, seen in the hills, was the subject of varied comments about Bonne Terre. Moreover, he knew her by the horse she rode,—he had seen it quite frequently grazing in the Bardsdell pasture. His heart beat faster, but not from the anticipation of selfish enjoyment. He was concerned in the meeting only so far as it might affect the interests of his neighbors and childhood friends. And because this young girl was the only daughter of Frank Bardsdell,—the idol of his household,—

he judged that his plan had a very good chance of success.

As the big horse struggled to climb the steep incline of the high bank, François stepped to the side of the road, his cap in one hand and his rifle in the other, and there awaited the approach of the graceful girl of fifteen who sat her mount so lightly. His mind took in at a glance the details of her attire, and, as a natural consequence, of her loveliness which was emphasized thereby. A dress, severely plain, but of some soft, clinging material, cut square at the neck, and exposing dimpled arms well above the elbows, outlined her young figure in white against the dark satin coat of her horse and the richly colored foliage of the trees across the road. Her hat, a broad-brimmed straw, white also, had slipped on the back of her head as far as the streamers of black ribbon knotted about her rounded throat permitted, leaving her hair, glossy as a raven's wing, free to fall in becoming waves about her ears and brow. Contact with the fresh air and the exercise required to manage a spirited animal had intensified the natural color in her cheeks until it matched the crimson of her delicately outlined lips. And her eyes, large, black, and merry, shone like stars as she leaned forward and stroked Sam's neck caress-

ingly as a reward for his successful ascent,—an expression of childlike enjoyment lighting up her features. As yet, she had not noticed the presence of the stalwart new Master of Bonne Terre, who stood motionless in her beautiful young presence, as if stricken with sudden timidity. Virginia made a movement to readjust her hat, but was interrupted by Sam, who, now that he had recovered from the exertion of climbing and had sighted level ground, was impatient for a canter. François realized that every second was precious. He stepped boldly in front of horse and rider. With a start, the young girl reined in her mount with the result that he snorted, pawed, and reared.

"I beg your pardon," said François advancing as if he would come to her aid, but she already had the animal under control.

"I am sorry I frightened your horse," François murmured contritely, "but I must speak with you."

The arched eye-brows drew close together in an angry frown, and the flush on her cheeks spread over her entire face and neck. "Who are you?" she asked.

"My name is Jean François, and—I believe I am addressing Miss Virginia Bardsdell?" the intruder stammered in a tone of apology.

"Yes," she said, bowing ever so slightly. Her composure was returning by degrees, but a superior look of outraged dignity and a determined set of the lips transformed, in a twinkling, the child of a while ago into a young woman, whose wits, sharpened by the habit of self-reliance, became her strong weapons. The young man was amazed.

"Again, I beg your pardon, Miss Bardsdell, but I do so wish to speak with you." The task François had set himself seemed more difficult than he had thought. The slightest encouragement would have been gladly received.

"And you stop me here, on the public road to tell me that! You kin just bet that I won't stop here much longer." With a sudden jerk of her head she added: "How dare you—Mr. François, when everyone says you haint even—one—?" Before the look of pain which stole over the man's face, she hesitated.

The incomplete remark again cut François to the quick and the blood surged to his heart. But he looked up steadily into the girl's eyes and replied:

"I know I should have come to your house. I admit that, but the idea I have in mind only occurred to me this minute when I saw you crossing over yonder. If I may have your permission to

explain to you my mission, you will see that it is of sufficient importance to excuse my apparent want of courtesy."

"Speak then, but do so with as little ado as you kin," she condescended, at the same time giving him a defiant, unflinching look. Then she looked straight ahead in the direction she intended to go.

"Thank you," said François, "you see it is this way, I have been considerably troubled about the Dades, and it is concerning them I would like to speak. I feel that if you—"

"Indeed!" she interrupted angrily. "Then if you think I'll hear any plea for thieves, you're mistaken. Good-day, Mr. François."

Sam received a sound slap on the neck and bounded off with his mistress before Jean could put in a word of defense.

"Humph!" he cried, "what a spitfire!"

Baffled in this attempt at peace-making, François resigned himself to let events take their course. All he could hope was that before the last minute something would come up to clear the threatening cloud. As a last alternative, he spent the remaining four days before the trial in searching the forests for Bardsdell's missing cows. No trace of the cattle was to be found, and the next day all those

concerned in the case were to meet at 'Squire Moore's.

The morning began with all the splendor that heralds an autumn day in the Ozarks. The sun streamed over red and goldtinted tree tops and flooded the hills and valleys in profligate profusion; flocks of blackbirds chirruped merrily in the tall sycamores; cow-bells on the hillsides clanged as the herd browsed on the last wild sprigs of grass; but the peaceful calm that hung over nature seemed to François the lull before the inevitable storm.

By nine o'clock, the country folk began to assemble at the log schoolhouse where 'Squire Moore held his justice court. The Prosecuting Attorney had arrived the night before, accompanied by Hugh Bartlett, of Farmington, who had been retained by the Dades to defend them. A quarter of an hour before court convened, the schoolroom was packed with men and women, among them, Virginia Bardsdell. The lawyers were busy interviewing witnesses. These were huddled in groups in opposite corners,—eyeing each other.

At last, the constable rapped for order, saying:

"Hear ye! hear ye! hear ye! this Honorable Court of Perry Township is now in session."

'Squire Moore adjusted his spectacles and called

the case: "The State of Missouri versus Silas Dade and Bud Dade. James White, Prosecuting Attorney, came forward and filed a paper.

Again 'Squire Moore adjusted his spectacles and announced to the hushed audience:

"The State for divers reasons an' objections prays a change of venue to Big River Township.

"There being no further cases, court is now adjourned."

At once there arose a hubbub of disgust from every side. Over in one quarter loud talking began, which threatened to precipitate trouble. Everyone had come to see the issue tried out, and, of course, a delay was very disappointing. The constable pounded loudly on the desk for order, and commanded all to leave the room quietly.

François rushed to the door, in an attempt to forestall the Dades, for he thought a clash between the Bardsdells and the Dades very probable, as soon as they got clear of the building. François noticed that Virginia Bardsdell was first to go out, and it again occurred to him to appeal to her to occupy her father's and brothers' attention while he took charge of Silas and Bud Dade. Surely, her good common sense would induce her to be reasonable and follow his advice.

By the time the peacemaker got out of the door,

however, the crowd had already separated, by common consent, as it were,—preparatory to hostilities. Nevertheless, he hurried to Virginia, and with everyone's eyes turned on him, unconscious of the effect he produced on those about, he addressed her in an undertone.

The on-lookers heard her say quite distinctly and clearly:

"Me speak to my father and brothers! Indeed, Sir! what do you take me for, and how dare you address me?"

Joe Bardsdell was at François in an instant, and roughly pushing him aside, slapped him in the face. They paired off in the open to settle it there and then. The crowd closed about them in a wide circle, some hooting and some shouting.

But Dade, white with rage, ran out and took hold of François. "What right have you, Jean François, to mix in my fight?"

"Get back in line, Bud Dade; I'll attend to you as soon as I've finished with Bardsdell."

"Come back, Bud!" shouted a dozen excited men; "take your turn, you'll have a chance at him before long."

Bud stepped back in the circle.

After throwing their coats behind them, the two men faced each other. All jeering ceased. A

rough and tumble fight, unprecedented in the backwoods as far as the size and strength of the combatants were concerned, was about to begin.

Joe Bardsdell, the champion whipped by Bud Dade two years before, scowled at the broad-chested, tall, big-boned young François who must defeat him if he hoped to fight Bud Dade, the bully of the hills. Bardsdell's square-set, almost savage features were livid with anger. His eagle black eyes flashed fire, his sun-burnt arms quivered with their own strength. He tightened the wide leather belt about his waist and went at François.

François, standing coolly waiting the while for the onslaught, fastened his eyes on the human beast that rushed at him. The attack was met with a measured jab of the fist that staggered his opponent. Bardsdell rallied and dealt his opponent a blow that brought him to his knees. Then they met in earnest. Sledge-hammer strokes fell so fast that no one could follow them. They clinched and rolled about in confusion, — the breathless crowd listening to the dull thuds doled out from elbows, and the muttered oaths which occasionally escaped from Bardsdell's lips.

There was a moment when the combatants were in such tension that neither moved. This was fol-

lowed by a hoarse, gurgling sound, and presently François stood up, leaving his antagonist limp on the ground.

Before the onlookers could express their approval or disapproval, stooping, he picked up the recovering Bardsdell, lifted him high above his head, and to the amazement of the rough backwoods mob, threw the kicking, swearing Joe in a heap at the feet of the astonished Virginia!

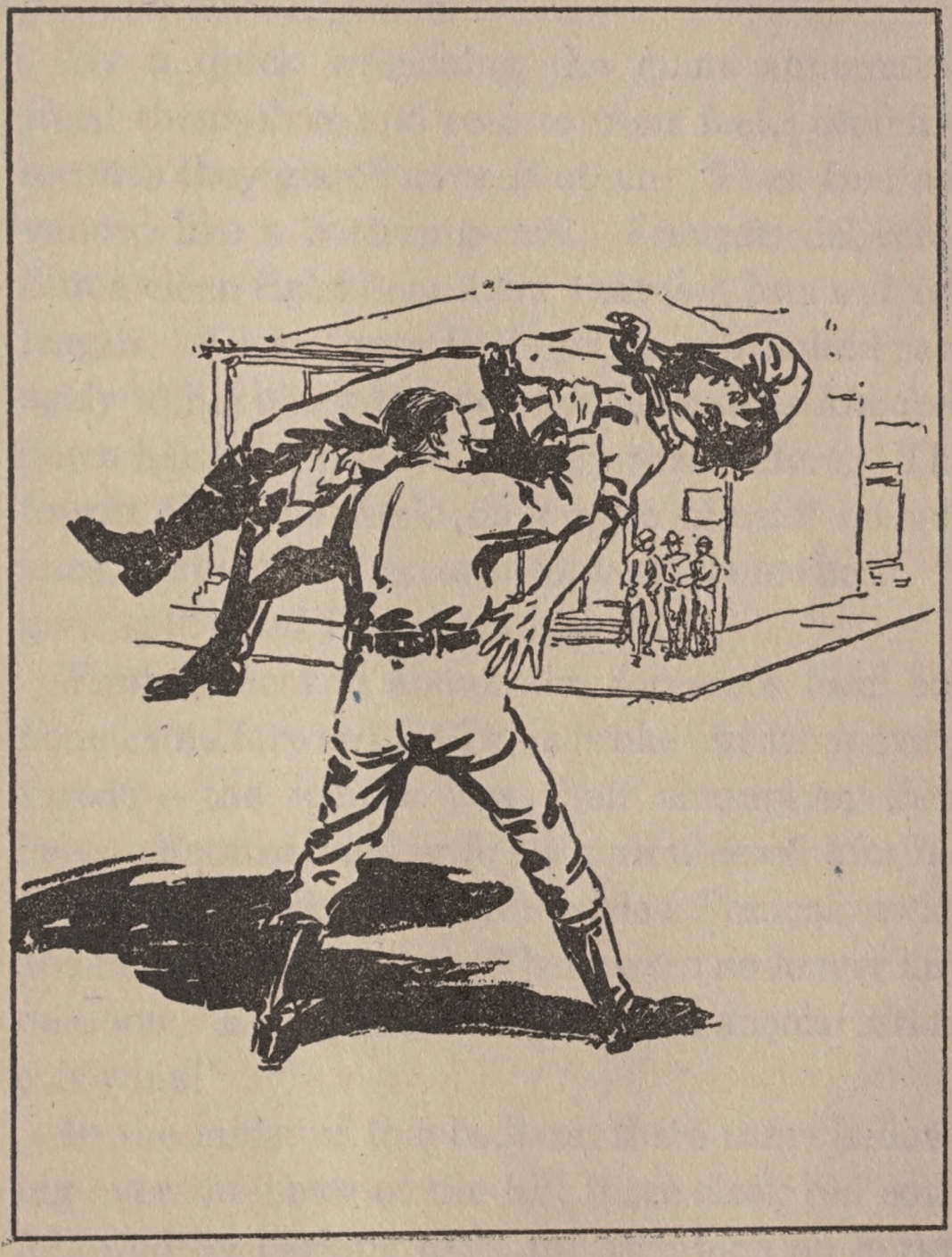
The woods echoed with a cheer. Hats and caps went up into the air and the circle closed in about the victor.

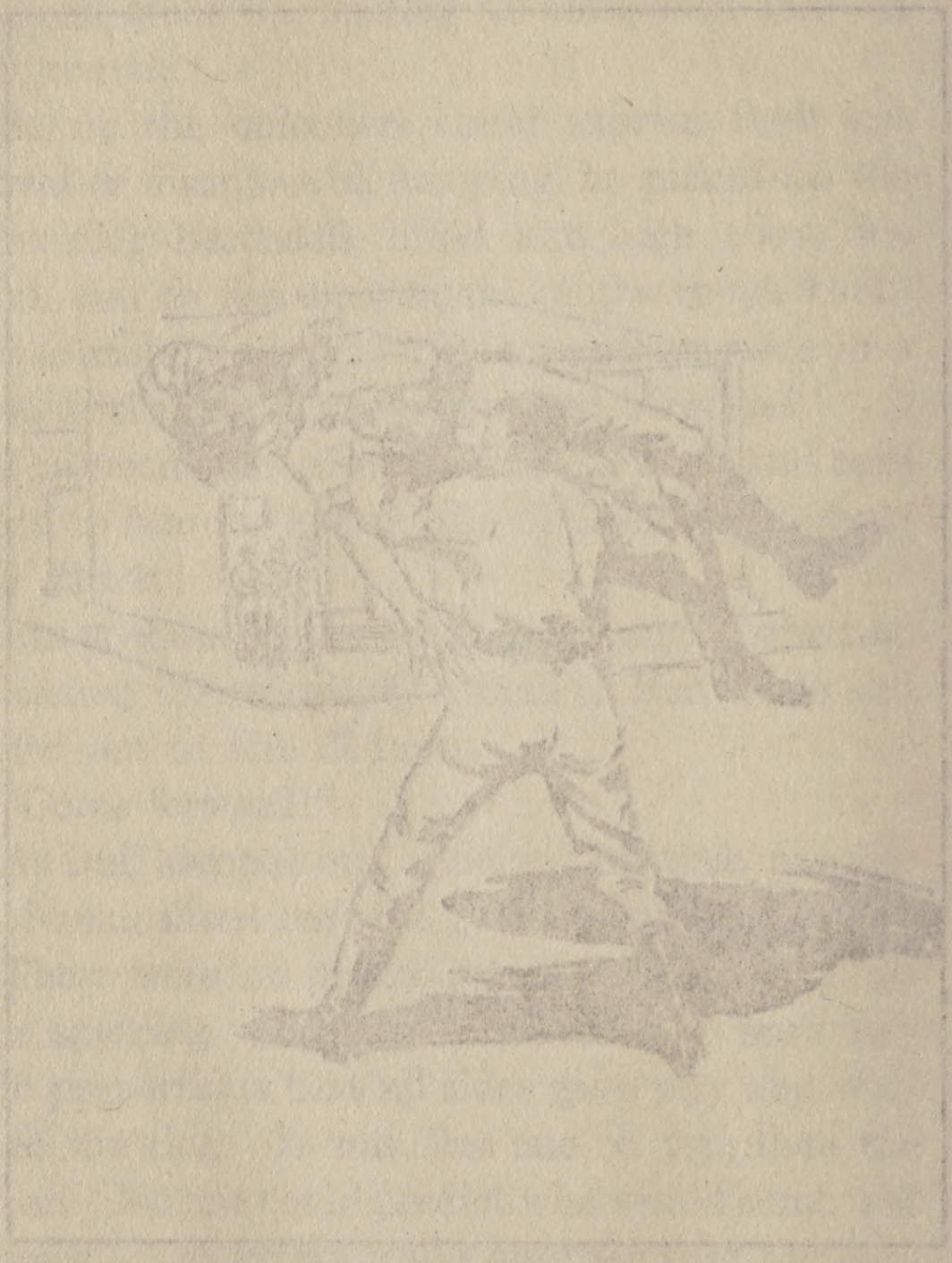
But without losing a minute, François, who had motioned the crowd off, turned to Bud Dade and yelled out to him defiantly:

"Come forward!"

As Bud stepped out to defend his title, another deafening shout rent the quietude of the hills.

There were no preliminaries, no bantering, no side sparring. The fight took at once such terrific proportions that all sides gave way and widened the ring. It was first one on top, then the other. No one could predict who would come out winner. The crowd could only see that the contestants were shirtless as they wallowed in the soft earth and beds of dry leaves while tell-tale pools





of blood spoke of the fierceness of the struggle. Still, no one interfered.

By a quick wrenching the giant antagonists freed themselves and rose to their feet. For five seconds they glared at each other. Then Bud advanced like a battering-ram. François delivered him a clean right hand blow that laid him out full length. Three times Bud got up and bolted savagely to his black-bearded foe, only to be knocked down harder and more cleverly than before. The fourth time, he could only raise himself on one knee. The crowd pressed forward somewhat. "I give up!" cried Bud as he sank back.

François looked about him for more foes, but none came forward. Cheers broke out from every throat — the winner was their champion, their hero. Four of the big fellows shouldered him before the excited crowd and carried François twice about the schoolhouse. There were no longer any factions. Every man screamed: "François! François wins!"

In the midst of this bedlam, there came bellowing over the brow of the hill three sleek red cows followed by barking dogs and two men on horseback. One of the men raced up to the crowd and right into it before he could stop, and asked excitedly:

"Whar do Frank Bardsdell live? Them thar blarsted cows of hissen have been in my corn-patch over beyan Bischtown nigh unto two months."

CHAPTER V.

THE DANCE AT DADE'S INN.

WHEN the significance of the return of the red cows dawned upon the already excited assemblage, joyous pandemonium ensued. The Bardsdells promptly apologized to the Dades and the stigma on their name was for ever removed. In the general good feeling that followed, Joe, François, and Bud made up and agreed to let the fights be remembered only as by-gones. Even Virginia came forward, and after complimenting François on his wonderful strength,—somewhat timidly for one as frank and outspoken as she, it must be admitted, —offered him her hand. The movement was a mixture of grace, bashfulness, and spontaneity, and François understood the feeling that had prompted it. The first impression she had made upon him at Pigg's Ford was revived with full force and he forgave her subsequent treatment of the would-be peacemaker.

Being so occupied in complimenting each other and in wiping out old grudges, the three witnesses

at whose instigation the charge had been made were momentarily forgotten. But Joe caught sight of them as they were slipping away—Morrison's two drivers and old Nan Simpson. Joe raised a hue and cry, and ready hands seized them and dragged them back to be judged on the spot.

What to do with them was put to a vote, but the majority wanted to hang the men and whip the old woman from Turkey Hollow. That would not do. François was appealed to, and he advised letting old Nan go, under promise never again to meddle in other people's business and never to recross the river. As for the men, since they had families, their punishment should consist in a "ducking" in Big River. As the river was but a few yards away their sentence could be put in execution at once. Furthermore, they should take the oath never again to bear false witness. The men, whose teeth chattered from fear, begged for any punishment except death. The now hilarious tribunal unanimously adopted François's views, so old Nan and the cattle drivers were brought forward, and the whole crowd moved in procession to the river bank and looked on while François and Bud, assisted by Joe, swung the offenders aloft and dropped them sprawling into the deep water. They swam and scrambled out to the opposite

bank and slunk away through the dense underbrush. This closed the incident.

Once back at the schoolhouse Silas Dade mounted the style block and addressed the people:

"While me an' me boys an' me old woman was powerful mad over this here business, we'uns is quite willing to forgit it now, and thar won't be any sting of it left. It haint 'zactly a blessin' in disguise, it's a sure 'nough blessin', out an' out, for it haint only cleared us, but it's done away with all bad feelings. Besides, we'uns have found a leader—(loud cheers for François) of which, howamsoiver, we'uns oughter to be justly proud."

Bud whole-heartedly threw up his hat and commanded three cheers for François. These were given lustily and the deafening noise went rolling down the river to frighten flocks of water fowl and many a wild deer that hid in secluded shelterings down stream, or sipped from the sparkling flood.

Silas continued:

"It's befittin' that we'uns meet again, under different circumstances to seal tighter the bond of friendship started today. Therefore, listen all, me an' the old woman invites you an' your families, your frien's an' their families, the fellers an' their best gals to a dance at Dade's Inn next

Thursday night—all night. Every one of you'ns an' all is welcome."

The general invitation of the Dades was accepted with great glee, and the crowd then dispersed, talking, not so much of the events of the day, as of the one to come.

During the next week there was great enthusiasm in preparing for the dance. Mingled with this, were the numerous comments on François, but after all was said, only favorable esteem remained. The majority accepted him as a hero,—a bully,—but the wiser ones appreciated the sterling qualities of which he had given evidence, and regarded him as an honorable man. The younger set wondered if he would be leader at Dade's dance.

On Thursday evening, while it was yet twilight, groups of light-hearted backwoodsmen began to arrive at the Inn. There, all was in readiness. Mrs. Dade and her daughters received the girls, conducting them to rooms where they could exchange their dress for the one they had brought along for the dance, and also put on their "nice" shoes. The young men stopped at the woodpile to chat with Bud and Tom, and whittle and chew tobacco. The older men congregated in the store with Silas. So by and by, in this characteristic

way, the grown-up members of the entire community were soon gathered at Dade's Inn, ready for the night's amusement, — at a party where everybody was somebody, and had an equal right to enjoy himself. No ill-feeling marked the event.

At last, the fiddlers began to key up their instruments. This was the signal for all to gather in the great sitting-room, which on such occasions became the ball room. The visitors came trooping in and sat down in the chairs arranged in a continuous row around the walls.

Among this jolly company were pretty mountain girls, chewing gum and blushing, as rugged farmers' boys and hunters cast sly glances at Jane and Susan and Sal. There were others of both sexes, both homely and sombre. Old man Douglas was conspicuous in his frock coat and white vest. As for Dan, every girl and boy, every old man and spectacled dame, gazed wonderingly at the young chap in his city clothes. Then there was lovely Virginia Bardsdell, secretly envied by all the lasses. Though haughty in her manner to strangers, Virginia was at heart very simple and sweet, as those who knew her intimately could testify,— and she could count a host of friends in and about Bonne Terre. This evening, clad in a pretty white gown and wearing neatly fitted shoes on her small

feet, she was by far the most attractive figure at the dance.

Seated around the room, and standing in the doorways and crowded in the halls there were a great variety of people present, and still more variously were they attired. Many of the young men wore coarse hunting jackets and high top-boots—only a few could boast frock coats, and those who did were either too large or too small for the garment. Perfumes and powder were very little in evidence.

From the elevated platform set up over the wide hearth of the great fire-place, the musicians started off with the first tune, "The Buffalo Girl." It was, of course, for an old-time square dance. The requisite number of couples soon stood out on the floor, and when the music began, they slapped their feet on the broad planks and swung off easily into the dance.

Tom Dade called the figures. He sang them off in a deep, musical bass voice, which never failed to grip the hearts of dancers. "Balance partners all!—Swing!" he led off. There was a hum and a rhythm to everything—the ball was begun.

As usual, humpty-dumpty Jane danced with tall Pete Wiggins; spry Katie Jones nestled her head on fat Terry Grimm's shoulder; and Sallie

Dade clung to her "feller" who had her monopolized for the night; so on. Virginia Bardsdell had been led out by Dan Douglas. They made a pretty pair as they tripped lightly in the joyous set—gay with many colors, but toned down somewhat by the rough, sombre dress of the young men. After the first swing, a spirit of hilarity took possession of the dancers, and amid bursts of laughter Tom Dade could be heard rolling out the calls:

"All han's to right an' left—duck 'em, Jane! Change!—fir-st to the right, th-en to the left! Back 'em up an' fool 'em thrice!—Couples on the corner, promonade!—roll'er Pete!—chassez all!—Han's roun'—balance to the center!—Swing!"

The fiddlers played all the old pieces dear to the memories of the dancers and the elderly folks, —"Askansas Traveler," "The Goose in the Bog," "The Devil's Dream," "Fisher's Hornpipe," "Black-eyed Susan," and scores of others. Reels, quadrilles, and jigs were equally enjoyed by the laughing young people, either chewing gum or eating apples, walnuts, and molasses candy which Mrs. Dade and her daughters passed around. The old folks looked on good-humoredly, chuckling, or jesting at the mistakes and awkwardness of some dancers.

Near midnight, Dade and Bardsdell stepped out on the floor, and Silas announced that the next set would be chosen by them. The girls and boys were to acquiesce in their choice of a partner without comment or argument. The men were to be four of the biggest and strongest, and the ladies among the fairest.

A buzz of tittering and inquiry went around, but was soon hushed to see what the two old citizens would do.

"I'll call the men," said Bardsdell, "and Si 'll match 'em up."

He promptly called out: "Jean François!"

Up to that time the young man had not danced, but enjoyed himself immensely, talking to groups of girls and boys and looking on. He wore a neat homemade suit of gray jeans and thin brogan shoes, and although his attire was not as attractive and smart as Dan Douglas's, he looked comfortable and striking.

He came forward quietly and took his place.

"Virginia dances with the champion of the hills!" announced Silas proudly.

Virginia blushed, as she took her place by the Master of Bonne Terre.

"Joe Bardsdell," announced his father.

"Jennie Dade," said Silas.

"Bud Dade," called out Bardsdell.

"Susie Gibson," and Silas winked mischievously at his son.

Frank McHenry and Sylvia Moore were selected as the fourth couple.

The music started, Tom's call chimed in, and the crack set moved in quick time.

The promises of Dade and Bardsdell were made good in their choice of dancers. Four finer young men, physically, could not have been found in the entire hill district. The girls, too, were handsome specimens of young womanhood, — no prettier lasses could have been selected in any gathering. The neighbors and friends who looked on approved Dade's and Bardsdell's choice, and congratulated themselves that their almost unknown wayside community could boast of as fine men and girls as could be found anywhere. Altogether, that final set before supper was a crowning success.

Up to that hour Jean François had reveled in his own self-sufficiency,—no woman had ever entered his life. Not because of any eccentricity or peculiarity in him, for these found no haven in his makeup, neither did vanity nor self-seeking. Hard experiences had failed to dim his clear vision for future usefulness, and moderation in all things had fortified him against ordinary weaknesses,

while successes and triumphs became mere stepping stones to a broader capacity for effective prowess. So, when he touched the fair hand of Virginia in the rollicksome scurry of the dance, and measured her graceful, sylph-like form with curious, boyish eyes that belied the semblance of sedateness and seriousness which his dark beard lent to his countenance, the sensitive, unblemished plate of François's heart was free to receive a well-focused impresion of her beauty and simplicity.

Subtle awakenings of mind and heart are not always heralded by the trumpetings of consciousness, or Jean's manner with his partner at the supper table whither he led her after the special set, would have been marked by embarrassment. Perhaps it was his unsophisticated self that permitted him to be charmed without reckoning with the golden threads in which he was becoming entangled; perhaps, again, it was Virginia's own unspoiled sweetness that lulled him into complacent acceptance of a new thrill, making of him a willing wanderer in an unknown field of supreme ecstasy, taking no note of the time-worn guide-posts marking the way. As for the sting of touched pride at their first meeting on the river bank, ten days before, it was completely forgotten. The fact that

her presence and pleasant chatter were soothingly enchanting did not alarm him. One by one the minutes flew, until the hour of intermission passed away as a brief pause on the outlook over a hitherto unknown valley of richest splendor.

The discordant tuning up of fiddles gave warning that the ball was about to be resumed. Quick glances were exchanged, indicating that swapping of partners was about to take place. Smiling, Virginia arose to join the bevy of merry girls. Somehow this interruption of his loiter in fairyland jerked François back rudely into reality, — a semblance of self consciousness making him appear awkward. Blushing, he began hastily:

"I thank you for your company, and—"

Virginia interposed.

"I've enjoyed yours, Mr. François, and I feel that I've got really acquainted with you."

"You are very kind, for my dancing is awkward and clumsy. I wonder that you tolerated it, also my accounts of rough life on the plains—"

"Why, Mr. François," interrupted Virginia, "you sure must have danced with them lovely Franciscans you told me of, for you are so light on your feet. As for your talk of Western 'speriences, I want you to come an' sit on the front porch to my

home some day soon, an' tell it all over agin. Pa an' ma 'll be delighted to listen to you."

"If you mean this as an invitation, I shall come."

"Sure I do. We'll be powerful glad to see you. Only if you do come, let it be before Wednesday week, 'cause pa an' ma have it in their heads to send me to Richmond to school. You know they comes from 'Ginia—that's why they named me—an' they've got high-ferlutin' notions about edercation an' specially mine."

"Well, you must take advantage of it," said François. "As sweet and lovely as you are you will not know yourself when you come back." He was himself once more, his eyes alone betraying the feverish interest with which he followed the girl's every movement as he stood towering above her.

Virginia was standing also, her hands resting on the back of a chair which she tilted as she swayed with the rhythm of the music, keeping time with one foot—a daintily slippered foot encased in a white stocking, a lace ruffle depending from some unseen garment fluttering just above her ankle. The same rich color suffused her cheeks as when François first saw her, at Pigg's Ford, and her eyes beamed with the same joy of living. Her hair,

arranged in several rows of curls—unruly black curls that bobbed up and down with every toss of the head—was caught up on one side with a large bow of white ribbon. A tight-fitting, square-necked bodice with short sleeves frilled at the elbows, and a wide, very full skirt of white poplin, the secret envy of her companions who viewed with wonder its gradual flare from the thick, heavy gathers at the waist-line down to the deep hem, had about them a touch of elegance that distinguished the wearer from the gingham-clad guests come from the surrounding hills.

During François's last comment with reference to her schooling, he had seen her make a sign to someone—evidently standing back of him. Turning slightly, he saw a tall, fine looking matron, dressed very much like the women of those parts. One glance at the girl before him and the young man knew the person to be her mother.

Virginia caught the look in his eyes and nodded:

"Yes, that's Ma. Well," she continued, "I'm awful hankering to go to school. I really want to learn, so I'll do my level best. Howamsoiver, I guess I oughter be goin'. I don't want to miss this dance. Why, I think they've already—"

"One second," cried François, "When shall I go over to—sit on the front porch?"

She had started across the room so she called to him over her shoulder:

"Say Tuesday night, if you can."

"I'll be there at seven in the evening."

"That suits. I'll be looking for you." With a wave of her hand she was gone to join some friends.

A moment later as she swished by, her skirt brushed against his knee, and he was electrified by the gentle touch—why? he did not know, and he did not try to reason out.

For some cause or other, the music had been interrupted and the dancers had scattered about the place, awaiting the next call. Virginia was with another crowd, and her clear, musical voice mingled with theirs in quaint backwoods talk and joyous peals of laughter, but to François, hers was easily discernible in pitch and quality. The young Master of Bonne Terre listened and compared. When the group moved to the ball room, he followed that not one sound of her subtle and delightful fresh chatter might be lost to his ears. Besides, it was fascinating,—strangely fascinating,—to watch her skip here and there, talking to this one and that one, as if everyone in the company held for her some special bit of pleasurable enjoyment.

Dan Douglas chose her for the next set and for every one thereafter until dawn. Twice when lulls came, he and Virginia waltzed to everybody's delight. François was apparently forgotten, but for the moment he did not care—he wanted to be unobserved. The first warning came to him in the form of a void in his heart that made it ache. One minute he envied the dapper St. Louisian, and wished that he had some of his polished city ways, or that he could waltz as well; the next, he forgot all the world and feasted his eyes on beautiful Virginia, who not only monopolized his eyes, but many others. By unanimous consent she was acknowledged queen of the ball.

Gaining self-poise, momentarily, François upbraided himself. Why was he piqued because the young girl did not look his way? Why did he fret because Dan Douglas commanded all her smiles? How did he compare with the rich man's son, he, François, the lonely owner of a blanket of land spread over three bald hills? What was he to this fair girl? What evil had Douglas done him that he wished, at times, to pitch him over the garden gate? He scarcely understood, and he did not interpret these feelings as the entry of love into his heart, love—the unknown and unbidden guest. For he did not know love, never associated it

with himself, and would have run and hid in the woods if Cupid had appeared before him undisguised.

Therefore, for the most part, since nothing else remained for him to do, Jean sat in a secluded corner, innocently wrestling with the golden skeins whose threads had caught him in the midnight hour and slowly but surely wrapped and enmeshed him body and soul, so that there was no return for him into the realms of satisfied singleness in his cottage on Blue Hill. His hands clasped on one knee, and his body stiff from being held taut in one position, the dreamer's dream was sweeter than the singing of a thousand choirs.

Somebody said:

"Day is breaking."

The music stopped suddenly, and the guests began to go. Virginia, in hurrying past François, saw him, and said ever so sweetly, with happy, smiling eyes; but such a tone of surprise:

"Why, Mr. François, I thought you'd gone, hours ago."

For lack of words, he replied: "No, I'm going now."

That was all. The fact that she smiled upon him once more quite compensated him for his long wait. It so pleased him that he paused in the

doorway and looked after her and Douglas walking down the road without experiencing the feeling of jealousy that had haunted him part of the night.

CHAPTER VI.

THE LONELINESS OF THE HILLS.

During the days that followed, François kept to himself and lived in anticipation of his visit to the Bardsdell home. He reasoned with himself as he returned late of evenings along some forsaken trail, and concluded he must be mad. But he never wavered in his purpose to go on Tuesday evening as arranged. It would be an injustice to his intelligence to say he had not as yet interpreted the feelings which had moved him so strangely that night,—at the dance. He acknowledged to himself that he was in love, but at the same time he called himself a fool, and a big one, as, on the afternoon of the day set for the visit, he struggled with an iron in an attempt to crease his jean trousers to make them look more like those Dan Douglas wore.

Anyway Tuesday night found him over at the Bardsdells'. They were exceedingly courteous and polite to him, but Douglas was here, monopolizing Virginia as before, and poor François had to sit on

the "front porch an' talk to pa an' ma," while Virginia and Dan walked in the meadow path.

There was no slighting. Virginia and Dan stopped by the "front porch" occasionally, laughing and chatting with the others, but with no idea that François looked upon his visit as a "special night" affair; hence Virginia felt quite at ease to leave him with the old folks.

François, while waiting for the couple to return, that he might speak a few words to Virginia before her departure for Richmond, wisely enough kept up a show of interestedness in Bardsdell's conversation, notwithstanding the various sensations that swept through his mind.

Just before the return of the promenaders, he had so mastered what he considered his schoolboy leap into sentimentalism, that he whispered to himself, under his breath:

"What an ass I've been for a whole week!"

But as soon as Virginia's clear laugh and ringing voice again reached his ear, he regretted the thought. The goodbye was said. And François walked home in the moonlight, communing with himself, and taking stock of his life. The disappointment flouted him, but it was just as well that he had the excursion in the untried all on his own. He was a better man for it. No accusation

fell from his lips—Virginia was not to be blamed. What had she done to warrant his violent passion? —No one knew, therefore, no one could laugh at his expense. His humiliation was in secret, but in good sound sense, he congratulated himself that he had discovered he had a heart.

"Perhaps," said he as he sat alone on his door-step before retiring, "this is a beautiful picture I may frame in my heart, a token that God has given me to work and live by as the days slip away."

So, when the sun climbed over the hill the next morning, the big, broad-chested Master of Bonne Terre shouldered his rifle and slipped away through the brush whistling a tune and thinking his thoughts without bitterness and without regret.

By and by, a changed man, he passed beyond the confines of backwoods' settlements and walked leisurely along a ridge trail, high above the gulches on either hand, from whence he could look out for miles over the haze-shrouded Ozarks. He loved the loneliness of the hills at all times, because in those almost impenetrable solitudes the whisper of nature seemed more audible and sympathetic. On this particular morning, he loved his surroundings more than ever, not because he was crushed

or sad, for this son of earth was strong and manly, but because he carried a secret in his heart. His thoughts, if set to rhythmic meter, would have been:

"To this, my inner house,
Hold I alone the key.
What I have here to rouse,
Hidden, is mine to me.

Triumph and tragedy
Mine till my soul depart—
No one but God and I
Knows what is in my heart."

Cool breezes from the ridges fanned his smooth brow. He felt the surge of blood in his veins. Grip fashion, he held his long-barelled rifle in his right hand, and swung along, in easy Indian style, to give his mind free right of way,—mischievous squirrels peeping at him from overhead boughs; blue jays hopping along the trail and flying away crying: "Jay! Jay!" A sleek, arched neck buck shook his antlers above a clump of hazels, but the Master of Bonne Terre passed on unmindful of spyings—hunting had no charm for him to-day, and his rifle was simply an idle toy of habit.

But no man can long lose himself in wilds of hills and changing scenery without clarifying the most muddled problem. François soon reduced his thoughts to one simple syllogism, dallied with it a moment, framed the conclusion heroically as

he had planned it yesterday night, and bravely locked it in his heart for ever, or another but very distant day.

"There! that's finished," said he aloud, "I'll go over now to yonder lookout and wait for Basil."

He quickened his pace, swung the trusted weapon over his shoulder, and was soon skirting the narrow ledge leading to Crag Lookout. There, it was his custom to meet, occasionally, old Basil Béquette when the two would go and tramp and hunt as Paul François was in the habit of doing in the days when he and Basil were younger,—before Jean went away. The hour of meeting was always set for the time when the sun cast a shadow on the lookout's bench. François ran his eyes over the overhanging rocks and observed that it was early. He would have to wait a while before the old hunter arrived.

Once up on the lookout, the young man sat down on the crag's bench and began searching the trail below for the stout, square figure of the old Frenchman. Bit by bit, he examined every yard of the circuitous path far down in the hollow, and, by dint of watching and waiting, he finally made out the buckskin clad form of his friend. Old Basil never failed to keep engagements.

As he sat quietly watching Basil toiling up the

difficult path, François fell to thinking of him. Why did he look forward with delight to the old hunter's company? Because Basil was highly educated and well versed in the history of the world, and because he was a strange sage whose judgment was sound and whose advice, when sought, was plain, straightforward, and almost infallible. Why did the old fellow live the life of a hermit in the fastnesses of the hills? That, François could not answer satisfactorily. There was no evidence of a ruined life—it must be simply the trait of eccentricity so often found among Frenchmen. Basil showed no bitterness in his limited intercourse with mankind. He loved the hills, the chase, the call of the wild. Yet, in his humble abode, he had a store of books on history and science that connected him up with the world that had gone on before and the world as it stood. Also, it pleased François to listen to the aged hunter's predictions of future events, based entirely upon logical reasoning deduced from the teachings of learned books and clear thinking, as they haunted the deer-licks in sequestered nooks of the Ozarks. This rather wonderful propensity of Basil was whetted once a year when he made a trip to St. Louis with his pelts.

There was something of boyish glee kindled in

François's eyes as Basil drew near. He shouted greetings down to him, and got back the usual high keyed response. It seemed to the young man that Basil's jacket of undressed deer skins became him immensely that morning. The tall beaver cap, fringed-seamed leather trousers rather close fitting, laced moccasins, and a shellbeaded shot pouch with polished powder horn, completed in fitting taste his primitive attire. Dijon, the faithful hunting dog, trotted a few paces in front of his master. The man's pleasant, intelligent face, sparsely covered with a thin beard frosted with white, and lighted up by sharp black eyes that looked out from under shaggy eye-brows, beamed with friendliness as he came within easy speaking distance.

"Well, Uncle Basil, you're here on time, aren't you?" asked François, raising his voice.

"Five minutes early, Jean. Old Sol hasn't yet cast his shadow to the hump on the bench."

"Oh! have you worked it out to such a fine point?"

"Yes, yes; observation, my son. When I went to school, in England, the master taught me to use my eyes."

"I never knew you went to school in England."

"Where, then, would I have got my English?—

I don't say zee for 'the' like other Frenchmen."

"I just thought you came by that from reading, or again from hearing somebody who spoke well."

"That has helped, but a Frenchman must learn English in childhood to speak it correctly and without a foreign accent."

Basil stood for a full minute studying his young friend. Suddenly, he smiled and shook his finger in François's face:

"I knew it would come," he remarked gently.

"What prank is this, Uncle Basil?"

"A fair lady!—tell me all about her, Jean."

François caught completely off guard, and dumbfounded at this proof of Basil's shrewd perception, fidgeted and reddened to the roots of his hair. He had meant to bury the lapse of his heart way down deep in himself until, perhaps, some distant day when he should be on a long tramp with Basil, far beyond Pilot Knob. But it was not to be, for now, in the open of the hills—on top of the grandest of them, where the broad azure blue smiled unobstructed, Basil exacted the tale of yesterday without delay.

"How did you guess it, Uncle?"

"Boy, I do not guess. The heart thrills with no emotion but that its record is written on the fea-

tures. I read clearly what it writes on your face."

"But—"

"Yes, yes; you intended to tell me at a time that to you would seem more opportune."

"Yes."

"Ah! and I see that you love her very much—a love from which you cannot escape."

"But, I'll have to—"

"Yes? Then she does not take you seriously?" questioned Basil, tapping his young friend playfully on the shoulder. "Her age or perhaps her position—"

François more surprised than ever, turned squarely around and stared at Basil.

"Yes, Jean—it's all written indelibly in your eyes and face, the love and—. Tell me about it. Do not mind the trees, the rocks, the loneliness of these noble hills, nor be ashamed that youth and manhood have met and crystalized in the supreme passion—love. You can not escape it if you would live. Without it you are as a scarecrow stalking about to frighten humanity; with it you are the embodiment and fulfillment of the nobility of man."

And there, on Crag Lookout, in the stillness of the hills, far from the world and nearest God's own heart, François unlocked the gilded chamber and

brought forth the beautiful picture to the sympathetic view of the old Frenchman. He spared no detail. Every word found a kindly lodgment in Basil's breast. And when the story, old as the hills themselves, and ever more wondrous, was told, the old man's eyes were dimmed despite his efforts, and the young lover's were fixed on the distance, as if staring at a vision that was fading away. Basil took Jean's hand:

"Hope, my son. This hope, if your heart be stout, will lead you far, and, perforce, make of you the man of your father's dream. Ah! how often did he speak of you to me on this same nature-kissed spot."

With that the subject was dropped. François picked up his rifle, and he and Basil, the dog leading on, went slowly down the trail.

Once out for the hunt, time passed quickly and pleasantly. All that day and the next, they went through forests and gulches familiar to Basil for many years. Basil was visiting his various traps, making ready for winter, and at the same time, he and François were keeping a sharp lookout for deer and wild turkeys.

As they proceeded, Basil talked a great deal about things other than hunting. Among them he spoke gravely of the presidential election due

in the early part of the following month. In September, he had ventured to Farmington to get posted, and had brought back with him a lot of St. Louis papers. After reading them carefully, it was his opinion that serious trouble would ensue if Abraham Lincoln were elected.

In François he found a willing listener. The young man's knowledge of the constitutional form of government and leading questions growing out of it was accurate, clear, and comprehensive. The white-haired priest in the west, who had educated him, was a true patriot, and finding in François a receptive, eager student, he had performed his duty so well as instructor, that the young Master of Bonne Terre possessed a creditably fair, general education. Besides, he had read much, and was able to give Basil the latest news, expressing his own views on the stirring events of 1859 and 1860 to date.

On the question of slavery, each held his views, purely of an abstract character; on the secession threat of the Southern States, they agreed that a division of territory would be a blow aimed at the greatest of modern republics, and, that it should not be permitted.

So while they wended their way through the lonely hills, they conversed together, and the

younger man had his convictions strengthened in advance of the coming crisis in the affairs of the American nation.

In the afternoon of the second day, while working their way homeward in a southeasterly direction, François shot a deer. It was divided between them, each fastening a half over his shoulder.

Just as the low western sun was casting long shadows over the three hills of Bonne Terre, the two friends emerged from the forest on the brow of a high neighboring ridge from which point they could view the whole of François's lands. They paused for a minute and surveyed the landscape, then Basil stepped slightly in front of his companion and said:

"In parting, Jean, permit me as an older man, to tell you of things I have recently pondered over.

"As you know, I am a strange man. I have the culture of the Old World, but for reasons of my own in which organized society could not possibly be interested, I have elected to live in these wilds. It serves my purpose and, besides, I live as close to nature as God would order. From the point of view of achievements, there is nothing or very little in me to emulate, and my advice thereby may

be thought the less weighty. But having known your father, although I had the misfortune of being away from here when he died, I am, nevertheless, the bearer of messages from him to you, given me at different times and to be transmitted as occasions arise. Now I am going to speak to you as if I were your father.

"You must come less frequently to the hills as a hunter. The day for following the exhilarating occupation of the Red Man has passed away. The civilization of this mighty republic has already spread westward, as you well know, beyond these hills to the Pacific. The environs of your beloved Bonne Terre are in the hands of a few poor, characteristic backwoodsmen, and my own retreat farther in, are isolated only because the soil is lacking,—hills and post-oaks do not compensate ambitious men. Jean, you are far too valuable a citizen of this great republic to waste your time tramping with me and others, killing and trapping animals fast disappearing. Turn your attention to civilization. Take your stand with the men of your country, and discharge your duties as an American citizen in the exercise of his birthright.

"Only last Wednesday, I came upon two city men, encroaching upon my hunting grounds, and as I was unobserved, hearing your name, I

crouched low in some convenient cedars and listened to them. They believe there is much money to be made out of your pocket lead mines, and, furthermore, they are coveting your lands. The younger of the two said:

" 'My name isn't Dan Douglas, if I don't get the lands. That shiftless orphaned hunter has no business with them."

François made a gesture as if he would speak.

"So, my boy," continued Basil, "turn your face from the loneliness of the hills and look sharp to your interests, and, at the same time, fill in the world the niche God has assigned you to when He endowed you with intellectual as well as physical powers.

"Now and then, your old friend Basil will leave his hermit's lodge and go to you, and together we shall smoke a pipe to keep fresh and green the memory of our comradeship. Till then, Adieu!"

CHAPTER VII.

AN OFFER.

François had listened respectfully to the picturesque old Frenchman, but made no comment. It seemed that Basil expected no reply. When he had said adieu, he turned abruptly and went away through an opening in the thicket.

For some minutes the young man stood still, lost in thought, and then wended his way down to his cabin.

It was difficult for François to accept advice, especially unsought advice. As a boy, he had resented "too much telling" from his father: hence his runaway escapade. Basil's rather abrupt remarks after their close companionship of the last two days, left a certain stinging rebuke in their wake, which grew in proportion as François pondered over them. Yet, he could find no fault with Basil's motive, only, what did it matter to the old fellow if the Master of Bonne Terre hunted and fished all his life? Did Basil know something of his father's past life?

By the time Jean finished eating a large venison steak he had fried himself, Basil's words were burned into his brain by the intense heat of humiliation. He acknowledged that the reproof was wounding the estimate he had of his manhood rather than his intelligence and sense of justice. Therefore, it was a long pipe he smoked in the open door that night, with the result that his decision amounted to a complete acceptance of the hermit's fatherly counsel, and a firm resolve to carry it into execution.

The days that followed found François going about among the few pocket miners on the estate, inspecting shafts and ore dumps. The miners were getting a fair amount of lead, but many mineral holes were abandoned,—the men said deposits were too "pockety" to warrant extensive operations.

Throughout these excursions over his domain, François was always meeting with Dan Douglas and his father, both of whom seemed to make exceedingly free with premises that did not belong to them. At first, François inwardly rebelled at this encroachment, and recalled the words Dan had used referring to him in Basil's hearing, a feeling akin to anger lighting and darkening his eyes in turn as he watched them suspiciously. But

now, as before, he was won over by their polite and apparently inoffensive manners. They were interesting men, well versed in finance and business of the day, and since they enjoyed coming to Blue Hill, François began to think he might profit by contact with them, and even learn a great deal of real value. So gradually he drifted into closer touch with them, and finally, casting caution aside, he completely disregarded old Basil's veiled warning. Besides Silas Dade vouched for them, —the backwoodsman's doubts arising from Donald Douglas's "strange stho-ry" on the night of his first appearance in the country, had quite vanished under the genial light of Douglas's smiles, just as François's had,—and why cling to what was probably a fancy? Hadn't he, Silas, and Donald Douglas and his son, spent many an evening together in the relic room, about the little round table laden with a plentiful supply of old whiskey, without the slightest shadow on the old man's face to show that Paul Grennard haunted him? Perhaps it had been the other way,—Donald Douglas might have been the benefactor. As Silas liked to say:

"A more substantial and at the same time jolly-don't-care old fellow never grasped one's hand."

Therefore, why persist and look upon him as a villain?

So, Jean François was satisfied, and when Dan Douglas stopped in at his cabin one day after his usual tramp over Bonne Terre, and offered to take over the pocket lead mines and finance them on a substantial basis, it never occurred to François it was not the best thing that could happen to him. If money was to be made out of the mines, they must be financed, and since he was not in a position to do it, why should he turn away a willing offer? There was so much he could do with money. In the morning he would go up and talk it over with Basil and he would see the wisdom of it. On second consideration he decided he would not consult the hermit, who, undoubtedly meant well but had no business experience. Jean decided to entertain the offer.

Dan's proposal involved no purchase, therefore he was not disregarding his father's wishes about holding on to the land. The offer comprised mining leases only, leaving the ownership of the soil to François. The Douglases were to pay one thousand dollars in gold and five per cent. in royalties annually on the gross output; also erect suitable mill, furnaces, etc., that the production might be large as compared to the irregular pocket

mining of a few individuals. A complete line of teams would haul the pigs of refined lead to the Mississippi for shipment.

That evening in the relic room at Dade's Inn, François talked it over with the two Douglases, and it was warmly championed by Silas, who was shrewd enough to see in the outcome of it substantial prosperity for his Inn. François was consequently easily persuaded from the start, and practically accepted terms without time for further consideration.

Dade proposed, to Dan Douglas's evident satisfaction, that the contract be drawn up the next day. He invited all parties concerned to meet the following night in the same place, with 'Squire Moore, to sign the papers and pass the money. 'Squire Moore liked a glass as much as any of them.

Before leaving the merry board an agreement was reached.

François spent the next day in building castles with his unexpected prosperity, to the point of blinding him to the importance of looking after his interests. Meanwhile, the Douglases were closeted at Dade's Inn, busily engaged in drawing up an agreement to bind François, hand and foot, for twenty-five years. After it was completed to

their liking, Dan Douglas drew up a second document on the same kind of foolscap paper, and over that an argument arose between father and son:

"Now, Pa, you agreed when we came down here on this mission that I should manage all the negotiations. You must give me free play. Hands off, I say. Don't I know what I'm about?"

"But I didn't agree that unfair advantage should be taken," said the father looking ill at ease. "That," he began angrily as Dan muttered: "Tut, tut,—"

"Keep your temper, Pa. He's a soft one, and you're trying to be one, too. If we don't pick him," Dan interposed suavely, "somebody else will. I tell you this is a rich find!—and no one suspects it for the moment. As for him, a thousand dollars will make him rich. Think of it! A thousand dollars! and you forget he's to receive five per cent."

"But, my son, I consider it ill-gotten goods, and —you know ill-gotten goods never prosper in my hands," and a look akin to pain came into the elder man's eyes. His anger had been shortlived.

"Your hands? true enough; but I'm to manage this affair. Besides, I deny it's wrong. We're paying gold for it—sharp bargain, perhaps, nothing more. If he signs this second paper with his

eyes open, whose fault is it? Clean business acumen, I call it."

"Go slow, Dan."

"Slow or fast, it shall be done to-night. Then, remember your often-harped prophecy about war. If war comes on, then this chap may be picked off. In that case, where would we be without title to this land?"

"Well, be sure you do a good job."

"Leave it to me. I'm off now to see that old jade, Moore; I don't propose for him to give any legal advice gratis, understand?"

Shortly after nightfall, the five men,—François, the two Douglases, 'Squire Moore, and Silas Dade, —assembled in Si's private room to spend together the first hours of the autumn night, and, incidentally, to conclude the most pretentious transaction yet conceived in the Ozark foot-hills.

François, unsuspecting and eager to consummate the deal, did not notice the agitated manner of old Douglas, nor the cool, calculating expression of the son. Dan assured François that everything was in readiness, and that as soon as a few social remarks were exchanged, the papers would be produced to be signed, and the money handed over.

Of course what Dan meant by "remarks" was drinks. A few drinks would help his scheme im-

mensely—the more drinks the better it would succeed. Silas had no objections to whiskey, and 'Squire Moore was fond of it; the Douglases liked it, and Jean François had lately imbibed as freely as the others. Accordingly there appeared to Dan to be a very fair chance—with the aid of the "strong stuff."

Silas unwittingly fell in with Dan's views of having a rousing time of it, and an extra ten-dollar gold piece placed in the old backwoodsman's palm provided the oldest and best brand.

The dissipation was begun with good stories, interestingly told by Dan, with two drinks around in the telling, and a third as they were still laughing and pointing out new phases of amusing features; then the shrewd manipulator took advantage of the general good feeling to read aloud a very fair lease, which he asserted was the document to bind the proposed transaction.

Silas Dade exclaimed: "That's it, boys; I haint much of a business feller, but with half sense, I could fall in with that there paper!"

"My legal 'sperience on the bench," said 'Squire Moore, with a slight inclination towards hiccoughs, "concludes me to assert that I'm 'bleeged to concur with the gentleman's views. It's legal an' bindin'—" this time a decided hiccough halted him,

"an' bindin' onder an' by virtue of the laws of the State of Mozoory."

This burst of approval on the part of the older men,—one of them a justice of the peace,—impressed François, and he said:

"It suits me also. I'll sign it."

But Dan Douglas was not quite ready for signing. Another drink or two would be desirable first. He hastily refilled the glasses and proposed a toast to the new mines of Bonne Terre. It was uproariously received, and the bottom of all glasses turned up to the ceiling.

"Dan an' we'uns expect to hear from you, Jean François," said Dade.

François mumbled out some sort of toast to the new enterprise while Dan handled the demijohn again. There were shouts and stamping of feet as before, then all glasses were emptied.

Quite suddenly, Dan Douglas realized that his own head was spinning, and not the room as he had thought for the space of a second or two. He observed that the three old men were fast giving in to the influence of liquor. In fact, 'Squire Moore was already half asleep. François eyes shone like balls of fire, but he sat upright. Old man Douglas was singing an old-time song. Dade stared straight before him.

With a supreme effort Dan roused Moore, informing him that it was time for the paper to be signed. He then staggered to the mantel for the ink bottle and the quill, almost dropping both in his attempt to transfer them to the table. He finally accomplished the difficult feat, but created a laugh by doing so, which somewhat enlivened everybody,—each one making a determined effort to appear all right.

Once seated at the table, Dan fumbled in his pockets for the papers—for two documents had been prepared and only one read. François noticed the second paper and asked:

"What's that one for?"

Dan replied blandly: "Oh, just a copy, so we can each have one."

"That's right," Moore managed to blubber out with great effort.

François reached for the pen and signed the paper Dan Douglas had read. Then the second was pushed forward, a corner of it being held by Dan, and François signed that also. Quickly the younger Douglas took the paper from François's hand, told him to put the first one into his pocket, and then shoved the second into Moore's hand, telling him to acknowledge it.

Moore, never forgetting his habit on the bench,

quietly drew out his glasses from their case, wiped them with his bandanna handkerchief, adjusted them once, then readjusted them, and slowly proceeded to spell out the document.

This exasperated Dan. Intoxicated though he was, he knew what he wanted, and swore at the old Justice so vociferously about the slowness of the law, that he succeeded in getting the official acknowledgement attached without further spelling out. However, Moore compelled François to hold up his right hand while he administered the usual oath of witnesses two or three times, until Dade roused himself sufficiently to suggest that it was unnecessary to swear a man in more than three times to any "durned thing."

Thus accomplishing the trick, Douglas brought out a money sack and poured fifty twenty-dollar gold pieces on the table. François counted the coins very carefully, and put the lot into his buckskin pouch.

Dan turned to look at his father, but the old man was asleep with his chin on his chest.

CHAPTER VIII.

NEW LIFE.

NEXT morning when François awoke, the sun was streaming in through the window. His head ached severely and it took him several minutes to recall what had happened.

With the tardy return of memory, events of the evening before quickly asserted themselves, and he thought of his gold. One bound brought him to his trousers that were sprawling on the floor. Yes, the money was safe. Now, where was the paper? Considerable nervous searching brought that to light also, and he felt more at ease.

The first thing a man says under such circumstances is usually the result of a brilliant stroke of brain activity,—the trouble is so few remember what they have said. François's first words were commonplace, perhaps that is why he never forgot them. Nevertheless they exerted some influence on his future conduct in the matter of drinking to excess.

"Now," said he, "they've got what they wanted,

so I suppose I'll be left alone. And as for Dade's whiskey, I've had enough of it; and I'll leave that alone."

It was several days before he saw Silas. When he did see the old backwoodsman, Silas called to mind the "signin' ", and related how all three of the "old fellers", himself included, had spent the rest of the night asleep on the floor of the relic room. Also, he imparted the information that the two Douglases had returned to St. Louis, after going to Farmington, and that in a short time work would be begun on the mines.

The thought occurred to Jean: "They did not think it necessary to consult me." A feeling of being an outsider took possession of him and gave him an uncomfortable sensation. All the while Silas was giving the news of the day:

He "reckoned" there would be much excitement next Tuesday at the election; was François going early? He 'lowed everybody would. There was bound to be trouble if Abe Lincoln was elected, and he spoke on and on until François heard quite enough to last him until Tuesday came.

In due course Abraham Lincoln was elected, but beyond a good deal of talk among some of the older members of the community, things moved on as usual. Deliberations of commissions and

peace congresses, as reported in the newspapers, did not enthuse the inhabitants of the quiet nook in the hills, principally because so few of the scattered residents read the papers. There were no slaves among the community, but, as it was strongly democratic, its sympathies were with the Southern States, and the conclusion reached by the great majority was that if those states wished to secede from the Union, they were quite within their rights. In fact, at the time, there were in the North a considerable number, led by President Buchanan, who held a similar view, disagreeing with the policy of Andrew Jackson, established some thirty years before, that the Union should be maintained at any cost.

François was one of the interested readers, but he kept his own counsel. He watched the ominous cloud gathering before the inauguration of Lincoln, realizing that the Federal government's stout refusal to recognize the entity of the Confederate States of America would ultimately embroil the country in civil war.

Business activity on the Bonne Terre tract quite overshadowed all else. The Douglases lost no time in prosecuting advantages gained by the mining transaction. Donald Douglas, in whose name his son had secured the rights, possessed independent

means. He surrounded himself with other wealthy men, from St. Louis, five of whom accompanied the Douglases to Bonne Terre and began work while looking to a permanent establishment of the mines.

This brought new life to Bonne Terre. Temporary homes were constructed for the incoming families, thus forming a nucleus for a village which took the name old Paul François had given his estate,—Bonne Terre. Forty or fifty carpenters, machinists, and laborers were put to work by the mining company, and backwoodsmen and farmers were invited to take up short leases on the company's holdings, so as to supply ore for the furnace which was fast nearing completion.

Silas Dade circulated a petition, and applied to the United States Postal Department for permission to remove the post office from his place to the company's lands. It was granted. Dade erected a neat store building, and opened up with a fair stock to accommodate the growing settlement, thus relegating Dade's Inn to the category of a plain farmhouse, and thereby adding to the popularity of the new town. In due course, other modest enterprises were started, and in a few months considerable life had sprung up on the three hills.

François entered fully into the development. The feeling that he was not to have any share in it was forgotten. He was appointed to superintend the independent miners, and received and paid for their ore at the central depot established by the mining company.

The development of the mines necessarily attracted to Bonne Terre people of an entirely different class. The St. Louis men brought down their wives and daughters, and while these and their friends were few in number, the tone of the place was raised somewhat above that of the surroundings. The Dade boys felt quite out of their sphere. The simple girls of the neighborhood did not shine as they once had, but harmony prevailed nevertheless, and during the winter several dances were held which tended to cement a certain amount of good feeling between the old-timers and the new-comers. Occasionally, strangers were to be seen in the single primitive street. Even old Basil found it interesting and worth his while to come there once in a while to read the newspapers.

François became popular with the miners, and soon got in with the city families. He was invited to their homes, and found himself moving comfortably in the small circle of the "better so-

ciety" fast gaining a foothold in the mining town, if the term of mining town could be applied to the cluster of rather crude buildings that dotted Blue Hill.

The manager of the Bonne Terre Mining Company was Adolf Birsch. Donald Douglas was president, and Dan Douglas held the positions of secretary and treasurer.

Adolf Birsch, although a smaller stockholder than the Douglases, dominated the company by reason of his personality and business capacity as a mining man. He had a beautiful daughter, Flora, who, very early in their acquaintanceship took a great liking to the big, athletic Jean François.

Mr. Birsch rather encouraged his daughter, but François visited the Birsch home without apparently becoming aware of possible complications arising therefrom. He enjoyed Flora's company and often walked out with her on the hills.

Others noticed the one-sided attachment, and it gave rise to some neighborhood talk that went the rounds. The quaint old dames and their daughters " 'lowed" it was strange that the erstwhile Master of Bonne Terre, one of their boys, should be "taken in" by one of the city "gals". They " 'lowed" again, however, that no city "gal"

need look down upon François. "He was plenty good 'nough for any of them, no matter where they hailed from." So with all due allowance for unavoidable gossip and criticism, the home folk were really proud of a prospective alliance between the hero of the backwoodsmen and a daughter of the "upper ten."

Thus with uninterrupted prosperity, the work went on and the population grew, unmindful of the approach of a national calamity. For immediately after President Lincoln's inauguration, affairs began to take a most threatening aspect. The Confederacy had elected Jefferson Davis to her presidency, and two governments divided the territory of the United States.

One day news came that the bombardment of Fort Sumter had begun on the afternoon of April 12th,—at 4:30. An excited crowd gathered in front of Dade's General Store, and before it dispersed, a fight had taken place between Simpson Poston, a bright, high-spirited Southerner from out Shake Rag way, and Joe Bardsdell, an avowed Union man. Poston got the best of Bardsdell, but received a bad fingernail scratch on the side of his nose.

It was the first blood drawn in that section of the state as a result of political differences, but it

lit up the conflagration of ill feeling, and, insignificant though it was, it marked the quick drifting of Bonne Terre into the maëlstrom of the country's restless waters.

CHAPTER IX.

HIS COUNTRY'S CALL.

War with all that it means burst upon the republic. Many took it lightly of course, and said it would be over in sixty days. President Lincoln's advisers held to this view and asked for a levy of 75,000 men to serve for three months. Then came the battle of Bull Run, a signal defeat for the Federal forces. It was then discovered that the Civil War had only really begun, and that the country must face the most terrible struggle known till then in history, — brothers fighting brothers, sons fighting fathers.

Citizens throughout the land quickly took sides. Feeling soon reached white heat, and demonstrations of patriotism served as an outlet for bursts of enthusiasm.

After bitter contests in their legislatures, Kentucky and Missouri remained neutral. These discussions embroiled factions against each other, so that fierce party feuds sprang into existence. Men who held for the South without going to the front

were called "Southern Sympathizers." Squads of armed men, and in many cases, soldiers, raided opposite adherents, taking them prisoners to keep them from joining their respective armies. These irregular proceedings forced many to seek safety by volunteering for active service.

Bonne Terre yet in her swaddling clothes, was strongly Confederate, and furnished many recruits for Camp Jackson, to aid in securing the secession of Missouri. François and the Bardsdells were the only Federals, or Yankees, in the entire community. The Bardsdells all joined the Northern Army but François kept out for a while. When the Federals concentrated near Jefferson City and broke up Camp Jackson, thereby saving Missouri to the Union, the Confederate element throughout the state became exasperated. This made it necessary for the avowed Union men to join the army—especially in the communities where they were in the minority. François's friends now eyed him askance. The old feelings of grievance were revived—it was clear that he was not one of them.

When the hour of stress came he decided to act without further delay. Again he sought Basil, and the hermit urged him to immediate action.

François had been aware for some time past that there was a plot afoot to capture him, but he

determined to give his enemies the slip. They would probably lie in wait for him on his way back from Crag Lookout whither he had gone to speak with the old Frenchman, so he took a different route from the one he had been accustomed to follow.

The plotters, however, were in no way disappointed for they had been advised to take François by surprise, at night, in order to avoid a possible interference from some of the miners with whom he was as popular as ever. As secret as they thought their designs, Flora Birsch got wind of them, and womanlike, fearing that her friend might get wounded in the fray—for he certainly would offer resistance to his captors—she resolved to warn him at the risk of her own life, if necessary.

Having quite made up her mind to circumvent the raiders, Flora started out in the direction of Blue Hill, trying hard to appear unconcerned when accosted by any of the natives, especially old Dade who had a long chat with her—and the conversation had hinged on François.

She knew that he was away. Where? she did not know. Silas had last seen him wending his way toward the ridge. All she could do was to watch patiently the trail that led to his cabin,—

she accordingly spent the greater part of the day concealed in the thickets that bordered the path along which he must surely pass. Her long wait was finally rewarded: as François, on the alert for anything out of the ordinary, was observing how the underbrush seemed to be rustling strangely, Flora burst out of her hiding place and told him breathlessly what would likely happen that night. They walked together as far as the cabin door, François thinking all the while of some means of escape. Suddenly, his glance rested on the bundle that was bulging out from the coat thrown carelessly across his shoulders in an attempt to conceal it. Then his eyes flashed.

"That will do," he cried, "I have it!"

Flora looked puzzled. Her blue eyes scanned her companion's face but he did not volunteer further information. He made a single request:

"There is only one way out of it, and you can help me. Spread the report that you saw me return to the cabin with a young man."

At once the boldness of François's project and its probable success struck the girl with amazement and her eyes lighted up, but the next instant although she nodded "yes", her quivering lips refused to frame a reply. She had thought only of saving him, and had not considered what that

entailed: his going away—to join the Union forces —perhaps never to return.

François's next words confirmed her fears:

"You must not stop here any longer. Good-bye, Miss Flora. I can not say whether we shall ever meet again, but God surely watch over you and yours." He held out his hand, but seeing that she had not taken any notice of his gesture—she was looking straight ahead, a strained expression dilating her eyes—he removed his cap and said feelingly:

"I must hurry, pardon me. Good-bye and thank you."

François had already stepped into the cabin and begun his housekeeping preparations,—wishing to leave everything in order—that Flora still stood at the entrance—staring at the consequences of her act. Then with a quick glance about for fear some one might be spying, she turned and walked hastily away. She had work to do.

The last minutes of dusk found her at the remotest house of the village, talking pleasantly to its inmates,—remarking in a most casual tone that Jean François had come home quite late in the afternoon with a strange young man,—and just about his size and build. In fact she had seen both enter the cabin.

As François peered cautiously through his window, not long after Flora was gone, he observed two men take up positions to watch his abode—that he might not escape. Jean smiled as he took note of their stature, they were both picked men. A moment later a third stalwart fellow came along and spoke to the guards. They shifted their positions but all three remained on duty.

There was nothing for François to do but wait. Although it was dark now, the men would not, according to Flora's warning, close in on him till late, so he had ample time to perfect his plan. He was prepared. Basil had given him a Confederate uniform that the good man had got hold of in anticipation of just such an emergency,—indeed the old trapper was farsighted.

It was a matter of a few minutes for François to don the gray and shave off his beard. A youth with cleanly-shaven face and all the accouterments of a Confederate soldier walked quietly up and down the little kitchen, stopping occasionally at the windows to watch the movements of the spies. That Flora had notified the villagers he had returned accompanied by someone, he never doubted for one instant. The young girl's manner had been too earnest for him not to trust implicitly to her word—though unspoken he knew

it had been recorded in a heart that was loyal to a fault. Well, since the men outside believed he had a visitor, they probably intended to wait until he was alone. This last reflection gave the clue that he was waiting for unconsciously.

Having closed up all the blinds as soon as he came in, he was perfectly safe in carrying on a conversation in two voices, making enough noise at the same time to attract some attention from the outsiders. At about ten o'clock, armed to the teeth, he opened the door,—still gaily talking in the stranger's tones,—and held it ajar, talking back into the cabin where a bright light was burning:

"Jean, old fellow, I'm sorry I can't persuade you to come along with me and join the Rebs. You may change your mind after a while. Anyway, I'm going down and I'll send some of the boys over to see if they can convince you. You've got plenty of friends about Bonne Terre, and if you'd only throw your lot in with them, everyone would feel all the better for it, especially Dade and his boys. Perhaps I'll see Si in the morning."

Here there was a pause, and François's reply came in low mumbled tones of his natural voice.

"That's all right, old chap, I don't think any the less of you for holding on to your convictions.

Remember that whatever you decide we'll always be friends. Only it is such a pity that friends should fight and kill each other. So, goodnight and good-bye. Many thanks for your hospitality. I must be going now—no, no—don't try to keep me overnight. I'm after catching up with some of our boys who've gone on ahead. I'll have to do some hurrying for they are lively."

The door was shut with a bang to drown anything that "François" might answer from the interior.

Those concealed in ambush were completely thrown off guard, and the young Confederate soldier passed unchallenged for fear that in stopping him they might arouse the one they were going to capture. In a few minutes, as soon as the light was put out they might advance.

Instead of going off through the village, as soon as François knew himself to be out of sight, he took a by-path over Elvin's Hill, and was soon safe in the dense forest, favored by a darkness too black to penetrate. His perfect knowledge of the woods served him and in a few hours he reached Big River, changed his uniform for citizen's clothes which he had managed to carry concealed under the gray, and hurried off in the direction of Ste. Genevieve.

Some time, near one o'clock, the posse, wearying of waiting for François to go to bed, closed in on the cabin and knocked at the door. Repeated knocks and commands failed to bring any response, so one of the men peeped cautiously through the blinds that François had purposely unfastened before leaving, and found to his amazement that the light was burning with no one in the room. It did not take them long to discover that they had been duped. Still, they could hardly bring themselves to believe that the smooth-faced chap they had allowed to pass unmolested and the owner of the cabin were identical. Exasperated, furious at having been baffled, they despoiled the cabin and set fire to it. Then they went away and notified their friends that François was a Unionist spy, that they had seen him disguised as a Confederate, and he must be caught before he reached the Federal lines. The next day, parties set off in every direction to scour the country.

Flora Birsch was besides herself with despair. Why had she interfered? He might have been held captive for a while but now he was sure to be overtaken and court-martialed and—She finally refused to face the last possibility. Her

strong nature asserted itself and she managed not to betray any undue anxiety.

But François was too clever a woodsman to be overtaken. No one knew the country better than he, and with a start of several hours on his pursuers, after crossing Big River and Terre Blue, he was never in danger of being caught.

By ten thirty the next night, he entered Ste. Genevieve and went immediately to the river wharf. A steamboat was just preparing to draw in her gang plank. He went aboard and was soon off down stream to join the army at any point where he might find the opportunity.

The spirit of adventure drove François from Missouri lest he be shelved with quiet service in the Home Guards. He fully realized that in espousing the cause of the Union, he estranged himself from the new-born village on Blue Hill, with its associations, and all his friends. It would have been easier to drift along with those he had known in childhood, but he was both strong and brave, and he did not hesitate to make sacrifices that the Great Republic, in which he believed and which he loved passionately, should not fall a prey to internal dissensions. For François, there was no North and South, there was one country and he held out for the side that wanted

unity. With that high ideal held sacred in his heart, he wished to be in the thick of the fight.

He reasoned correctly that the South would be the battle ground, and perhaps Louisville was rather fresh in his memory, but anyway as the big steamboat headed down channel, her brass band playing "Dixie," it occurred to him suddenly to go to Louisville to enlist.

In two days he arrived and was duly enrolled in the Federal Army. Hard training and manoeuvers soon put his regiment in shape for active service.

Not long after that, his division was pushed out into the field, being rushed to the battle of Fort Donaldson for its first fighting.

Following that successful engagement, other scenes of severe conflict came on rapidly amid which François learned to be an experienced soldier, unflinching and daring.

CHAPTER X.

THERESA.

During these exciting events, time sped on rapidly, recording many victories to each of the belligerents. By the beginning of the second year, François had seen service over a vast area and wound up by being taken prisoner, spending many weary days in Libby Prison and wondering all the while what was happening on the outside and at his beloved Bonne Terre.

Back at François's home in Missouri, the war had stayed the development of the mines, although Douglas, with ample means at his disposal managed to hold things as they were and keep a few men at work. Bonne Terre being out of reach of activities enjoyed more or less exemption from depredations of guerrilla bands, in the early part of the troubles, but the women folk of those who had gone to war had to be cared for, and provided for, so Douglas really worked hard to do what he could for them and his own group, by keeping the mines going. His son Dan had

joined Price's army a few days before François's departure. He was then alone to carry a heavy load of responsibilities.

Towards the first of 1862, things almost came to a standstill in the village. The outlook was exceedingly gloomy and everybody leaned more and more on old man Douglas. He lived with Silas Dade whose family had been reduced to himself, Mrs. Dade, the daughters, and the hounds.

About this time there appeared one day in the village a visitor whose advent was destined to add some excitement to the quiet, dull life of the place. Dade was alone in his store when a lady, somewhat elderly but dressed in the height of fashion, walked in and after staring at him for a minute or so addressed him familiarly.

Silas looked up from a rough piece of brown paper on which he had been adding some figures, and in his astonishment nearly jammed the pencil in his ear instead of back of it, in the meantime gazing at her open-mouthed, fearing to trust himself to speak.

"Don't you know me?" she asked, taking a seat next to the large wood stove in the center of the room, her wide skirt of black taffeta rustling as she shook the dust from the many ruffles. She

turned her head about and looked at him smilingly from beneath her black poke bonnet lined with lace and flowers,—poppies.

Silas came out from behind the counter and stood on the other side of the big round stove. His lips were now firmly compressed over his toothless gums and his long straggling beard seemed to be charged with some of the electricity that sent flashes out of his greenish gray eyes, narrowed to a mere slit.

"Do I know you?" he hissed.

The woman was in no way frightened nor abashed.

"Yes," she replied, looking at him straight in the eyes.

Dade gradually resumed his natural expression. Only a shade of suspicion remained.

"Of course, I know you, but I thought you'd cashed in long ago."

"No indeed, and as you see I'm very much alive. You wonder what I'm doing here, and I don't mind telling you. I've followed my husband to this God-forsaken corner of the earth, that I had hoped never to see again.

"Your husband?"

"Yes, my husband, Donald Douglas Esquire."

"What!" exclaimed Dade and at the same time he felt the floor move from under his feet.

"Don't be alarmed, my good Mr. Dade—I don't mean to do him any harm or I might have attempted it long ago—it is not a recent union either. I married Donald Douglas twenty-eight years ago, and that handsome young man that goes about with him is my son Daniel."

"You don't tell me so," he answered politely while a slight hectic-like flush settled on his high-boned hollow cheeks,—in a heroic effort to stifle the promptings of the memories of a certain night when he had listened to Douglas's recital of domestic unhappiness.

"Yes, I do tell you," and Theresa raised her head proudly. "I am Mrs. Donald Douglas and not what you once thought—the woman Theresa. Where is Mr. Douglas?"

"Over to the mines."

"And Dan, I believe, if I've been correctly informed, is in the army. Price's army they told me in St. Louis."

"Yes, that's it, and everybody else's sons have gone along, too, to Price's army or some other's."

"Yes, yes, by the way—" and for the first time since she had addressed the old backwoodsman she faltered.

"Yes, yes, by the way," repeated Silas encouragingly, more than half divining her thought. His curiosity was aroused.

"Tell me, Dade, is Paul still alive?"

"Nope, he's dead. Yes, dead—his wife Helen, also. Both died the same day—both buried together the same day Jean come home."

"Jean was their boy, I believe, tell me about him."

"He's joined the Yankees—haven't heard from him nigh to two years."

From the time Theresa had announced her relationship to Donald Douglas, Dade was on the alert—the fact is that he realized something unusual was happening the very minute she had entered his store, but, at the time he first recognized her he thought principally of her connection with Paul and not at all of Douglas. The situation was complicated and Dade's abstraction after answering her last question made it quite evident that he was considering matters most carefully before committing himself any further.

"Now, look here, Mr. Dade," broke in the visitor, "I know what you are thinking of—but put it out of your mind for the present. You must not mention that I ever knew Paul. You will understand why when I tell you my story."

She leaned over confidingly and patted Dade on the sleeve.

"You shall know the whole sad story, for—I need your help." At this point the lady fumbled in her hand bag and brought out a dainty handkerchief. She pressed it to her eyes, then with a faint sigh she returned it to the reticule. "Tomorrow, I'll tell you the part Paul played in my life. Now the most important thing to consider is what you can do to effect a reconciliation with my husband. He drove me away from him unjustly, years ago. For the sake of a mother's love—if for no other reason—for I do love my son—really, Mr. Dade, you must help me."

"It's a big order, There—sa, I mean Mrs. Douglas."

"So it is, but I told you why I've come, didn't I?"

"I haint sayin' but that you have, but this here patchin' up business haint much in my line—I haint hankerin' pertic'larly 'bout mixin' in dermestic troubles. 'Specially when one of the parties concerned is my best frien'—that's what Mr. Douglas is!"

"That's why you can help me—why I need you. You're just the man I need, can't you see it?" and Theresa looked at him pleadingly. The

woman seemed very much in earnest despite her ultramundane appearance, not very much in keeping with the years whose stamp was plainly visible on her one-time prettiness,—leaving countless lines on every feature—especially about the mouth.

Dade was still doubtful. He looked at the woman scrutinizingly but could not make her out. Being inclined to excuse others, he was just saying to himself after a suspicious sizing up of her finery: "Must take heaps of money to buy such clothes, but perhaps they're cheaper in the city."

His glance did not escape Mrs. Douglas.

"You must know, Mr. Dade, that I have all the money I require, so that I'm not an object of charity. When Mr. Douglas put me out of his life, he provided for me in trust. I can pay my own way."

"Well, I'll do what I can, though it haint clear to me 'zactly how." Then an idea occurred to him, "Perhaps you'd better keep away till I git it figured out. I can't ask you here 'cause Mr. Douglas lives with me an' my old woman."

"Is there a place where I can board?"

"I'll git you to the best place I can—that might help matters somewhat," suggested Dade. "Howamsoiver, let me see. Mrs. Birsch might take you

in, but, if it's just the same, you'd better take another name."

"No, I refuse to do that. I've made up my mind to come here and win back my husband. I shall do so under my own lawful name."

"I like your pluck, hanged if I don't!" exclaimed Dade, "but begging your pardon, you forget your visit here more'n twelve years ago, others remember it."

"Only the better reason for using my name. Besides, I was supposed to have met my death at the time and was known as Theresa. No one but you would know me now." After a minute's silence she asked: "Then you think, perhaps, I can get to live with this Mrs. Birsch? She is a stranger here, is she not?"

"I suppose you've durn nigh got me, Mrs. Douglas, with all those reasons. Yes, I'll see what I can do."

"Now, Mr. Dade, I must speak to you plainly. I see that you think I've been on the dark side of life, but you are mistaken. There is nothing in my past positively improper. I did a great many things to spite and aggravate my husband to pay him back for the wrong he did me; however, *you* have no right to judge my conduct. Now I know better, I have changed and I am

going to change more and more. As you see I'm an old woman; in my younger days, in foolish ignorance of the consequences, I once turned to Paul and—you know the result. I need you for a champion, you can do what others can't and you must."

Dade had already committed himself to the task, and looked upon this peroration as the forerunner of something further—a sort of second installment. He fidgeted a little, then pulled nervously at his long, gray whiskers. Could he really trust this woman, or was she drawing him into her meshes? It was but natural that she should declare her innocence.

Theresa continued: "Perhaps it is a little cowardly or ungenerous to wait until you are one among the 'frayed ends' and then try to become the heroine in a romantic reconciliation."

Dade was not exactly a "lady's man" but he possessed a certain amount of inborn chivalry, "Frayed ends!" he exclaimed "I don't see you're powerful frayed yet. I'd say if anyone asked me, that you're a purty smart looker." He cocked his head to one side and continued. "'Specially in them city clothes."

"That's all right," Theresa was unwilling to

take offense, "but I'm not what I once was, not even twelve years ago."

Dade looked slightly embarrassed. She continued:

"I wasn't bidding for compliments—but I know you meant well."

"Lor' yes," quickly interposed Silas in an earnest endeavor to excuse himself, "I haint nothin' for flirtin' nowadays. Ladies mustn't expect it from me, I'm glad you don't."

Theresa laughed.

"Now," said she, "run along, Mr. Dade, and see Mrs. Birsch. You don't need to relate any of my history, do you understand?"

The backwoodsman reached for his slouched hat and hurried off, but not without many misgivings that he might be setting his foot into a bad muddle.

On the way he philosophized nearly in the words of a modern humorous writer:

"Don't ever believe you know what a woman's going to do—no, not till she's done it, an' then you don't know neither."

In a few minutes he returned to the store and reported that after much persuading, Mrs. Birsch had consented to accommodate Mrs. Douglas.

The visitor arose and thanked Dade. She then

went out to the man who waited a short distance away in a democrat-wagon, and following Silas's directions, drove off to her future home.

Mr. Birsch was away at the time, or there might have been some question about taking in a paying guest. But Mrs. Birsch and Flora had reasoned that with war times and so little coming in from the mines, a boarder would not be amiss.

Mother and daughter hurriedly put a spare room in order, and gave orders to Malinda to show the lady into the parlor pending their preparations for her reception. They got through a short while after the expected guest's arrival and instructed Obediah, the colored man, to carry in the trunk that was still standing on the back of the spring-wagon,—a huge leather trunk.

Their first impressions of Mrs. Douglas were not favorable, that is, Mrs. Birsch, if not Flora, began to doubt the advisability of launching into the boarding-house business with that sort of person as a guest. Flora relented, on second thoughts, and took to the "lonely lady," succeeding in convincing her mother that it was positively wrong to judge people on short acquaintance, and much more so on a first introduction.

"The poor thing," persisted the young girl, "why, she's been driving all day, and is worn-

out. She'll look more up to the mark to-morrow."

"But that's just it," retorted Mrs. Birsch, "I don't think she looks worn-out after her traveling. She looks just a little too smart." After a doubtful shake of her head she added: "It may be all right, but I don't like her flashy dress."

"Mamma!" cried Flora reproachfully, "you know some people have strange notions about dress. I rather like her round, pleasant face—and her eyes, such pretty black eyes. Besides anyone with gray hair like hers can't be very, very bad."

"Yes, but it's done up in such outrageous style! Still, we took her in on Mr. Dade's recommendation and that ought to be sufficient, I admit."

Mrs. Birsch's misgivings were mollified by Flora's pleas, and that evening when the guest came down to dinner, looking a little more somber and sedate in a neat black polonaise, Mrs. Birsch amended her opinions, and joined heartily in talking about St. Louis and the old-time families.

Suddenly, Mrs. Birsch's face brightened, she had been struck by a coincidence in names:

"There is at the head of our mining company, a very excellent gentleman by the name of Donald

Douglas, also from St. Louis. Is he by any chance connected with your family?"

"Yes!" cried the guest, and so decidedly that the hostess set back on her plate the morsel of food she was in the act of conveying to her mouth. Her eyes sought her daughter's.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MEDIATORS.

It was long past midnight before Mrs. Birsch dropped off to sleep. She had tossed restlessly on her pillow, blaming herself for having permitted old Silas Dade to persuade her to take this boarder. She did not like her, she was now sure of it. There was something about the woman's answer to her question regarding Donald Douglas that seemed to forecast a tale of some sort. What could it be but an evil tale, for had she not understood from her own husband's lips that Douglas's wife was dead? After she had resolved for the tenth time that she would send "Mrs. Douglas" away the very next day, sleep put an end to her worries.

Flora did not look at the seamy side of the situation. Besides, she liked mysteries, and was interested in Dan Douglas so that what concerned his father was worth while fathoming. But there could not possibly be any scandal attached to it—

both parties were too old, so why was her mother nervous about the poor woman?

The Birsches were not alone in their speculations. Theresa failed to sleep for hours after she went to bed. She had not intended to let out her story so soon, and repeatedly said to herself: "How stupid of me! Oh, how very stupid!" Then she would add: "I fell into the trap. I wonder if it was set on purpose? No, I think not. I have only myself to blame. I should have parried that question until I'd won the esteem of Mrs. Birsch. To-morrow, I must either avoid mentioning Donald or say something to correct the impression my 'Yes' made on Flora's mother. The girl seems friendly, I wonder how far I could trust her?" She thought out plan after plan to avoid the subject, or fix up what she would say should her husband's name be brought up again. None of the plans suited her, and in the end she acquired a violent headache for her pains. Slumber had not come to her rescue and the cocks were crowing for dawn, that the dread of spending a day in tete-a-tete with Mrs. Birsch still stared her in the face.

When breakfast was ready, Theresa did not appear. Mrs. Birsch frowned and despatched the

negro cook upstairs to say peremptorily that breakfast was being served.

Malinda, the good soul, and incidentally the boss of the Birsch household—she had grown old in the family's service—rolled her eyes and obeyed so far as to go up. She returned shortly and said as she reached a dish on the table:

"She haint acomin' down, Missus—she's sick, so ah'ze gwine to fix her breakfus an' take it up to her."

"Set down that dish, Malinda. You'll do no such thing. Go tell that lady that her meals are not to be served in bed."

"Lor' Missus, think whut you'ze a doin'. Dat lady sho am sick, you jist oughter see de ban'ges on her head! 'Fore God, Missus, dat's the truth ah'ze tellin' you, an' ez I done tol' her ah'd take up her breakfus—"

"Malinda," Mrs. Birsch spoke severely while the culprit seemed to look at her through the white of her eyes, "I think I've made it clear that—"

"Let her, Mamma. Malinda wouldn't say the poor woman is ill if it were not so."

Malinda grinned thankfully at Flora:

"Sho, Miss Flora, she am sick, an' you know ah wouldn't say a falsehood. She 'peahs like—"

"Never mind discussing her, Malinda. Since you've made up your mind, you and Flora, I have nothing more to hear about your patient."

Malinda went off into the kitchen muttering to herself. She dearly loved a little excitement and there was apparently something brewing. She had never heard "Missus" take on so about serving breakfast to anyone who complained of being ill. As a rule she was the first one on the spot to investigate—Malinda shook her head so that her gay bandanna had to be readjusted before carrying up the tray. When she came down a couple of minutes later she had both hands in the pockets of her gown, and one was toying a bright dollar the lady had given to be divided with Obediah for taking up her trunk on the day previous.

In the meantime Mrs. Birsch had told Flora that she wished to speak with her privately immediately after the meal.

The "private" talk between mother and daughter availed nothing. Mrs. Birsch insisted that in her mind Mrs. Douglas was associated with something questionable, to say the least, and possibly a great deal worse than they had any idea of. Flora said such ideas were preposterous and that the poor "old lady" should not be tor-

mented and made to feel uncomfortable. The result of the conference after much debating on both sides was that they would "wait and see."

Mrs. Douglas came down the stairway in time to hear all the latter and essential part of the discussion about herself. It confirmed the fears she had entertained during the night, and while it put her on her guard it made her exceedingly nervous. Still, she resolved to play a clever game, now that she was positive she was suspected, and if successful, she would win the two women to her cause.

It is admitted by the world at large that women can outwit men and that they can always depend upon having the last word in an argument, but when women are pitted against each other, it is scarcely safe to pick out the winner beforehand or even predict the result. Antagonism, suspicion, intrigue, a sense of superiority, when paired in feminine reckonings, may suggest the most amazing turns in their actions. Theresa forgot momentarily having aroused Mrs. Birsch's curiosity by snapping out the word "yes" so as to inject into it the bitter memories of a lifetime. She had thought to ignore the spirit in which the comments just heard had been made, but the discovery that Flora's mother was deeply prejudiced

by suspicions, on second thought, made her very angry. She knew that even a good woman is impossible to deal with when her mind is poisoned by the insidious suggestions of a mystery that promises revelations detrimental to another.

Thus handicapped at the outset of her final attempt to win back her husband it was with difficulty that Mrs. Douglas assumed the most winning smile in her power, and advanced to greet mother and daughter, saying:

"A bright, sunny morning—and I'm shamefully lazy," with a sigh that Mrs. Birsch thought was intended to recall her illness at breakfast time.

"*If* you're not feeling well, your tardiness is excusable," put in Mrs. Birsch stiffly.

Mrs. Douglas ignored the implication in the "if" and went out in the open air.

In the natural sequence of thinking and acting, women do not lay out intricate schemes of conduct. These creatures of impulse are victims of the power which urges them. A thing is done in a moment and over with. Mrs. Birsch planned no accusations or even a set conversation with her guest with a motive for entrapping her. But this is what later happened as the two ladies met face to face on the front lawn:

"Come in, Mrs. Douglas. It's pleasant to sit

on the side veranda." Flora's mother, on the contrary, had firmly resolved to show no resentment of her daughter's charge of stand-offishness.

"I should be so pleased," responded Theresa, "I had a bad head on awakening this morning, but the delicious breakfast Malinda brought up quite put me right, and I feel better."

Malinda's mistress felt ashamed of her attempted refusal to have breakfast served upstairs.

"I am so glad you feel better. Flora and I are always so well that I thought Malinda was putting on when she asked to take a tray to your room. I opposed it, but Flora pleaded that you must be ill, and I consented. Since it helped you, I am glad I relented."

Flora thought her mother's frankness unnecessary and that it might offend. She had just come on the scene, and with the kindest intention in the world she added:

"Mamma isn't old enough to understand how much little comforts are appreciated by real old ladies."

Mrs. Birsch looked surprised, and thought she should ward off offense.

"Why, Flora!" she cried laughingly, "Mrs.

Douglas is not a real old lady. She isn't at all feeble and decrepit."

"I don't mean it that way, Mamma—you know I didn't, and you, too, Mrs. Douglas."

"I'm sure you didn't, Girlie," put in Mrs. Douglas. Then all three laughed.

"Just come through this room," said Flora cheerily a few seconds later when their hilarity had subsided, "we must all enjoy the sunshine of this extraordinary morning, if it is January. We often have pleasant weather like yesterday's and to-day's in this part of the state, in mid-winter."

They passed on to the glass-enclosed veranda. The sun's warm and spring-like rays flooded the place, and Flora, drawing easy chairs toward the two ladies settled them comfortably therein with a lot of cushions about them. Then she brought out a low stool and sat at their feet, her elbows propped on her knees and her hands cupped about her chin; she felt happy at having scored a point, —her mother appeared to be on friendly terms with the guest.

For several minutes they all chatted on about commonplace things, taking mental notes of each other's appearance as the bright light exposed their good or weak points. Mrs. Douglas could not

help but notice the smoothness of Mrs. Birsch's skin, on which time had left no scar; only her matronly figure and hair—silvery gray on her temples—betrayed her age. She must have been a little past fifty. Otherwise, her plump, oval face, even teeth, bright hazel eyes, and resolute mouth could have been admired as belonging to a woman of forty. "She has spent a uniformly happy life," thought Theresa. Then she took stock of the vivacious, mischievous daughter, whose warm heart shone in her expressive features, lighted up by deep blue eyes, shaded by long, curling black lashes that at that instant cast her a sympathetic, almost affectionate look that gladdened Theresa,—it seemed to say: "Don't be afraid, and if you need a friend, I can be that." Flora had the same kind of flawless skin which was her mother's greatest asset. It showed transparent where the sunshine caressed it, and no amount of exposure had ever seemed to detract from its delicate fairness that blended so charmingly with the rich coloring of maidenhood. Her dark brown hair had glints of auburn running through it and downy ringlets detached themselves from the tightly coiled tresses and strayed on her nape and above her straight eyebrows of the same dark color. Mrs. Birsch and

Flora also sized up their guest, and quite unconsciously, they did so simultaneously. They agreed, each to herself, that she had undoubtedly been a beauty in her day—a brunette with round, betwitching face, and the figure of a goddess,—probably her curse, was the added comment of the mother, while the daughter tried to picture its one-time gracefulness and elegance. She was well above sixty, good-looking still, but some former undefinable quality of expression seemed to have developed into the astute cunning of a cat. So manifest was it that both mother and daughter wondered at it. Mrs. Douglas's bearing betrayed nothing of the past, that is nothing questionable, the visible rings under the eyes, deep crow-foot wrinkles, and a drooped mouth told plainly the story of a sad past. Was it of evil? Mrs. Birsch was not sure. Flora answered to herself: "Surely not."

Quite easily these impressions were stored away, and the conversation turned to St. Louis again—the Chouteaux, Bribriants, *de* Lessups, Marchands, and other families. Then the Barr family was brought up and discussed; how marvelously they had got on in the world's goods. Julius Barr, Mrs. Birsch recalled, had purchased

the wholesale business and the importing house of Douglas, Bryant & Company.

"Did you know him, Mrs. Douglas?" asked Mrs. Birsch.

"Yes, very well," was the reply.

"That Douglas is now our Mr. Douglas," Flora volunteered innocently enough.

"Yes," was the simple comment. No one guessed how difficult that little word was to pronounce.

Without premeditation, Mrs. Birsch followed up the opening made by Flora's remark: "I believe you said last night that Mr. Douglas was connected with your family?"

"Yes," scarcely audible.

"Any relation or simply a connection?"

Theresa colored perceptibly and became confused. But with an effort she nerved herself to speak the truth—it was absolutely necessary to do so in order to enlist Mrs. Birsch's and Flora's sympathies in her cause.

"Oh," said she, "he's my lawful husband."

A painful pause ensued, then Flora asked:

"And Dan?"

"He's my son."

Mrs. Birsch had frowned and a look, half incredulous, had crept into her eyes. For one mo-

ment she bridled up and stared straight at her guest.

As Theresa caught the eyes of her hostess fixed on hers in doubt, and condemnation, the fast welling tears in her eyes rolled down her colorless cheeks. Mrs. Birsch, in reality, a most charitable person, murmured apologetically: "Forgive me, Mrs. Douglas, I did not mean to be inquisitive, only—"

"It's all right—I know you did not mean—how could you know my story. However, it was bound to come out, and now that it's out, it's just as well,—really I meant to tell you,—Mrs. Birsch and Miss Flora,—only I thought I'd wait until we'd know each other better."

"Let's change the subject, then. Another time will do," suggested the young girl.

"No, no; please let me explain." Notwithstanding her wanting to do so, Theresa broke down and wept bitterly.

"I think we had better leave her awhile," put in Flora looking at her mother. She had risen and was standing back of Mrs. Douglas's chair.

Mrs. Birsch had not moved. She made a sign to Flora to remain when the latter spoke of going.

Theresa, more composed, continued: "I need your help—our chat this morning makes me feel

that I can, perhaps, ask you to assist me in seeking redress for my wrongs."

Flora, instead of resuming her seat, placed a hand on the afflicted woman's shoulder and patted her soothingly. Looking at her mother she was surprised to notice that the expression on her face was decidedly unsympathetic, and to make up for her parent's apparent indifference she redoubled in her attentions towards Theresa, whispering softly:

"If you think it 'll do you any good, just go on, Mamma and I will listen."

The woman seemed to be quite different from her former self. She had broken through the thin armor of affected complacency and seemed altogether at the mercy of her feelings. As for her clever handling of the situation it had passed completely out of her power. She seemed crushed,—and with a lurking dread, she said: "I want to tell you at the outset, Mrs. Birsch, that the fact I am a mother and have a son, has kept me innocent of—"

It was an unfortunate beginning as far as Flora's mother was concerned; she fidgeted in her seat. Theresa continued.

"Yes, innocent of certain wrongs. I have neither murdered nor stolen. In other ways, as I said, I

have been careless because of my husband's conduct—only careless."

"Mrs. Douglas," interrupted Mrs. Birsch sternly, "you will excuse me if I send Flora away—there is something I should like her to attend to for me this very day."

"Mamma!" pleaded the young girl, "wait until Mrs. Douglas—"

"Then I shall have to attend to it myself," and Mrs. Birsch arose and was about to leave when Theresa straightened herself and stood before her barring her passage.

"No!" she exclaimed hoarsely, "I shall not tell you! Like all women who have never suffered you believe that I—I am in the wrong—that I have done wrong. I can read your heart. That is why all these years I have shared my secrets with no human being—a man would have taken advantage and a woman would have sneered and turned away. I can trust no one!"

Then she went into weird, hysterical ravings, striding back and forth across the veranda as if out of her mind. Her wailings were so terrible and her menaces so savage that both listening women trembled and clung to each other, fearing to move or speak. They could not understand her accusing phrases nor imagine what awful thoughts

transformed her from a weak, but amiable, apparently rather frivolous woman, into a mad demon. It seemed that this unexpected fit of anger lasted hours. At times expressions of remorse escaped her. Her rage seemed no longer directed at Mrs. Birsch who felt conscious of having provoked it, however, by her interruption. Flora tried to scream, and Mrs. Birsch measured with her eye the height of the casement, forgetful of any other exit. "I have done no wrong, I swear it!" cried Theresa, and as suddenly as she had gone off into maniacal fury, her passion left her and she groped feebly to the nearest chair. Sinking limply into it she looked calmly at the two women.

Flora was at her side at once and propped her head up with a cushion. Mrs. Birsch approached and leaning over her murmured: "Poor woman!"

Theresa looked at her gratefully and murmured:

"Forgive me. You think I must have been out of my mind, you must not believe that, for I'm not. Do not be afraid, although my wrongs and suffering at times drive me to the verge of insanity. I shall never attempt to speak of them again. The want of sympathy—"

"Oh, don't" cried Flora, "we did not mean—"

"Yes, yes, I know, yet it is always that way.

But really it is best that I should not speak—, for the sake of my son. If only you would let me rest, my head aches so."

"Poor dear," and the young girl's forehead wrinkled in perplexity. "It's the camphor we want, Mamma call Malinda."

Before Mrs. Birsch had time to turn, the bandannaed head of Malinda was thrust through the open window that Flora had pushed up for air.

"Ah'ze on hand, Miss Flora. What you want, honey?"

"Bring the camphor."

Theresa pressed her hands to her bosom and cried:

"Oh! my heart!" then she stood up and gasped.

She dropped heavily into Flora's arms.

"Mother, quick, call to Malinda to hurry and get Obediah."

The burly negro who was listening at the door was at the girl's side in a second and relieved her of her burden. Theresa had fainted.

After a few minutes of excited work with her she was carried upstairs and placed on the bed. Flora sent Obediah off to French Village after the doctor, for scarcely had she and her mother succeeded in removing Mrs. Douglas's clothes and putting her to bed, when she swooned away a

second time. It took more than half an hour to revive her. She was so weak that they feared for her life.

Mother and daughter sat down, one on either side of the bed and stared at each other. It was clear that they were in for an experience. Not a word was spoken. There was no necessity for words—the expression of despair that put their countenances into a panic of terror required no speech to explain away the situation or make it more poignantly bewildering. What could be done? Flora, more resourceful than her mother, racked her brain for an answer. She looked at Theresa who was resting quietly.

"I know," she whispered to her mother, raising her forefinger to her lips with a warning "Sh—". Then she tiptoed to her and said softly, but with stress on each word:

"We must send for Mr. Dade."

"That's the thing to do. This is his affair," and the good lady looked at Flora as much as to say:

"He got us into this predicament—it's up to him to get us out."

Flora lost no time. She left the room without disturbing the sleeper and went down at once. She was a creature of action,—warm-hearted and loyal, but thoroughly practical. She called Ma-

linda to her and told her to go after Mr. Dade.

"Malinda, now mind, don't tell him what's happened. Just say I want to speak with him at once."

Malinda with a knowing nod, and an ominous rolling of her eyes, hastily dried her hands in her blue-checked apron, and started for the back gate with a quick pace, her ample bosom and other generously proportioned parts keeping time with her step as she waddled along. Flora watched her until she disappeared at the turning of the "short cut" that led to the backwoodsman's store, never for one minute decreasing her speed.

In a very short time, the faithful old cook and maid-of-all-work was bustling about the kitchen.

Dade was but a minute behind her. He came in through the front door, looking very uneasy. Malinda had flatly refused to tell him what was the matter although he had seen Obediah, a very few minutes before gallop past his place at full speed, on the old white horse, and had plied her with questions.

"Come right on in here," called Flora who was waiting for him in the large drawing room.

Dade advanced nervously twirling his hat. There was a threatening note in Flora's voice.

"Mr. Dade," she began, motioning him farther

in the room and closing the door, "you've got mamma and me in a fearful mess. Do you know who this old lady is that you have succeeded in installing in our household, heretofore a quiet, respectable home?"

"Eh!" replied Dade pulling himself together with a decided jerk.

"Eh? Eh! indeed; you may well say eh!—but is that giving me any light on the subject?"

Flora looked very severe, almost fierce as her eyebrows met in a frown and her shoulders shook in unison with her head,—one hand on her hip and the other raised towards him.

"Why, er— that is, I asked her name, an'—an' —says she, she said she was Mr. Douglas's wife— haint that good recommendation?—Haint he respectable?" Dade had guessed that it was of no use to beat about the bush.

"Ex-act-ly so," Flora's voice was the strangest compound of severity, outraged righteousness, and sauciness not to say boldness, that Dade had ever listened to.

"Exactly so," she repeated, "*Mrs. Douglas* and why didn't you say to us yesterday, Mrs. *Donald* Douglas? You gave a home to the old man, you took him in and why didn't you take in his wife? don't plead scarcity of room. *Your* place could

easily accommodate Price's army. Tell me why you turned her out when she applied to you in the first instance?"

Silas was fairly caught. In shifting his weight from one foot to the other the toe of one of his boots got caught in some way by the heel of the other, and he came near falling forward on Flora. She uttered a little cry which soon brought Malinda to her elbow.

"What's the matter, Miss Flora, honey?" and she scowled at Dade.

"I didn't call you, Malinda. You'd better stay within earshot of Mamma. She might need you."

Malinda obeyed, mumbling as she went: "Ah knows ah wasn't called in but all dis here squeemin' an' faintin' am 'bout skeered mah clean out mah head."

"Sit down, Mr. Dade, for goodness' sake."

"Looky here, Miss Flora, I must admit you kind o' got me flunked. What's happened? I can talk much more to the pint, if I'm in on what's gnawin' the sack," put in Dade recovering his customary practical good sense.

"Now, Mr. Dade, 'happened', that's a mild term. Why, this boarder, Mrs. Donald Douglas never intimated to us who she was until we accidently mentioned her husband's name. Then she

told us she would like to tell us her story, but instead of a story she said some very strange things about needing us to help her redress her wrongs. And because Mamma interrupted her once she changed her mind and went off in hysterics, tearing her hair and threatening to do some outrageous things. The upshot of it all was that she ended by having an attack of heart trouble. Obediah's gone on a ten-mile dash to French Village for the doctor. In the meantime she's had a sinking spell and mother and I are petered out and frightened within an inch of our lives. *Happened!* indeed! and—" Flora stood up and looked at Dade with a sort of contempt.

Dade felt the glance rather than saw it.

"And," resumed Flora, "you are the cause of it all. If she dies it will be your fault."

"Miss Flora!" there was in the old man's voice a hint that she was going a little too far.

"How much of Mrs. Douglas's past history do you know?"

"Nuthin', 'ceptin' what she's said to me."

"How often have you seen her?"

Silas never would tell a lie and this last question caused him to jump and become confused more than ever.

"I'm waiting for your answer, Mr. Dade."

"I haint flinchin' I'm just hesitatin' a bit," he managed to say.

Flora almost lost control of her temper.

"Flinching is the word! If you're not flinching, then speak out."

"I seen—I seen her 'round these here diggings more'n twelve years ago."

"Was Mr. Douglas with her then?"

There was something so compelling about Flora's manner that Dade was powerless to resist.

"Well?" Flora indicated she was waiting for his answer.

"No, but Miss Flora, I dassen go no further. It brings up reps of dead people an'—an' a lot what no one oughter talk 'bout."

Then her mother was right thought Flora with a sigh.

"And that's the way you imposed on poor Mamma and me?"

Flora burst out crying.

This frightened Silas more than anything she could have done or said. It finished him. If Flora had not been one of "them highferlutin'" folks he would have patted her on the back and begged her not to cry. Dade was miserable. He twisted his old slouch hat until he made a cady

of it. At last he asked in a shaky voice, watching the door for fear Malinda might hear Flora's sobs:

"What you're crying for, Miss Flora?"

"Don't ask me," was the reply between convulsive sighs.

"Miss Flora, I guess I look awful bad to you."

She dried her eyes and sat there looking straight at him. Dade felt encouraged.

"You see a man haint got no sense, nohow, no he haint. Yisterday when she come over I wasn't hankerin' to talk to her, but she whined and coaxed until, by gum, afore I knowed it, I packed off here and had a talk with you an' your ma. I'm just in the same position as you, she took me in,—inflooence of woman, I guess. Look how I've been listenin' to you an' answerin' all your questions. Howamsoiver, now that I've gone an' did it, I'm at your mercy. Do what you like with Silas Dade, only I beg you, by ginger, don't tell my old woman 'bout this here business."

Dade saw his mistake in a half second.

"Miss Flora, that last I said 'bout my old woman haint quite right, don't take it on the wrong side, for there haint anythin' betwixt me an' any bloomin' soul on this here dad-burned earth I'm ashamed of. I guess I'm just an ord'-

nary cuss but there haint anythin' low 'bout me."

Silas thought for an instant and observing the look of trouble in Flora's eyes he continued:

"I can see that ownin' up seein' the old lady in these parts some twelve years ago's exerted a prejudice on your mind 'gainst her, but I want to tell you that there haint anythin' wrong 'bout that, there might have been but there wasn't. Howamsoiver, as I said before, I can't say more 'bout it on'count some dead frien's, leastwise for fear you might think wrong of the livin' I'll just stretch a pint an' say that Jean François is consarned in an honorable way indirectly to a considerable extent,—no, not directly himself. He was just a boy at the time."

The last few words were meant to dismiss the look of incredulity with which Flora looked at him, and strengthen his assertion.

Flora did not know what to think. She was in a more complex state of mind than she had been previous to Dade's visit. But her excitement had quieted down and the mention of François's name—what possible connection could he have with the matter?—it was preposterous, but it took her mind off the main issue for one instant and when she thought of it again her vision was clearer.

"Well, Dade, you've got us into a most undesirable position. You've got to help us take care of the poor old lady, for I do believe she'll die, and if not, poor thing, she's in for a long spell of illness."

Flora now spoke in subdued tones. The fact was that she had always pitied Theresa; all her anger had been directed against Dade.

"I guess all three of us'll have to help her out now."

"Three? and what about her husband unless you mean him when you say 'three.' But I don't want any more disturbance on the premises."

"Well, I did promise her I'd see what I could do but—"

"What!" exclaimed Flora, "You wouldn't take her in your own home, but you must bring her here to patch up her domestic quarrels? You promised her you'd interfere, did you?"

"Yes, I promised," said Silas taken off guard.

"Well, you're a worse fool than I thought," and there was the suspicion of laughter in her voice.

Dade looked sheepish.

Long before Flora left off quizzing Dade, the warm-hearted girl had forgiven the old fellow his share in the adventure. She could see plainly

how he'd been inveigled into his present dilemma. She was silently amused at his discomfiture, but resolved to make the most of it.

Also, the words dropped by Silas, that Jean was "consarned" indirectly had piqued her curiosity. If she managed the man right, there would be more to learn.

"Now then, Mr. Dade," Silas looked up quickly, he telt relieved that she was no longer angry, "since you have made the three of us—yourself first, then Mamma and me, mediators to bring about a reconciliation out of this domestic tangle, run along and tell Mr. Donald Douglas to hie up here as fast as he and you can."

"If that's all you want me to do, I can bring him here."

"Dade," Flora looked severe once more, "You are to tell Mr. Douglas the truth. First of all, has he any suspicion, or any idea, that his wife is here?"

"Nope."

"Then you tell him to come immediately and tell him everything that has 'happened'!"

"All right, Miss Flora, an' I'm off at onct."

Dade left in a hurry.

Flora went part of the way upstairs, then hurried out to the gate and called to Silas.

He came back slowly, expecting that something awful had occurred. Perhaps the old lady was dead.

"Don't look so frightened," said Flora, laughing freely for the first time. "I just want to caution you not to breathe a word of this to anyone, especially Mrs. Dade."

Dade didn't know whether to laugh or not. He didn't quite see the point of the joke. He turned away but Flora called again:

"Do you ever talk in your sleep? If you do you'd better tie something over your mouth at night."

This time Dade walked right up to Flora:

"Wild-cats an' fir-crackers! I haint plum' clean out o' my head, Miss Flora!"

He closed one eye and looked at the girl calmly out of the other for some seconds. Then he turned away and went towards the mines.

CHAPTER XII.

THE HAND OF BLIGHT.

ALMOST an hour later, Silas Dade stood again before Flora. He twisted his old hat as he had done on the other occasion, and looked decidedly embarrassed.

Flora gave him a withering reception.

"Where is Mr. Douglas?" she demanded sternly.

"He—he woudn't come."

Flora sank into the nearest chair.

"You told him all that 'happened' and he woudn't come?"

"Nope."

There was a short silence then Flora braced up:

"I knew he wouldn't come, Dade, I just felt it. If he's been hard-hearted enough to abandon his wife he's liable to do anything. What did he say?"

" 'Lowed he warn't makin' up at the nether end of life; that we'uns didn't consult him 'bout takin' her in; an' as she's got 'nough money to pay her way he wasn't necessary. He says he couldn't be

held responsible for her; that we'uns'd have to make the most of it."

"But, Dade, did you tell him she's likely to die?"

"Yes; but says he: 'She haint of the dyin' kind!"

"Well, in that case, Dade, you're responsible for her."

Silas looked at the girl aghast. Did she really mean it? What would Mrs. Dade say to that? Flora's anger would be as nothing compared to his old woman's.

Flora guessed his thoughts but relented after he'd been sufficiently tormented.

"Yes, Dade, you're responsible for her, but as I'm afraid you can't give her the proper attention she requires,—we can't allow her to suffer,—Mamma and I will continue to look after her, only you must do your part. Go along now to your store and hold yourself ready to be at my beck and call."

Dade bowed and went off feeling that he had escaped with less condemnation than he really deserved.

As Flora had predicted, the doctor found Theresa's condition alarming. He thought she might

recover but after a long spell of illness and with the most careful nursing.

Mrs. Birsch threw aside all resentment and together mother and daughter set themselves to the task in the proper spirit of kindness. Day after day passed and night after night but the two women never flagged in their devotion to their patient. As for Donald Douglas he completely ignored his wife. Occasionally Flora would inquire of Dade whether he ever spoke of her and the honest backwoodsman would invariably answer: "Nope."

This was, however, the smallest trial the community of Bonne Terre was called upon to go through. The hand of blight had been raised to strike and destroy.

It was true, war had called into the ranks all young and able-bodied men, but hitherto, the remoteness of the settlement protected it against the brunt of war's cruel blows. By and by, tentacles of the terrible dragon reached out and smote even the hearts of those in the quiet hills. Word came that Jean François had been sent to Libby Prison; that Joe Bardsdell had lost his life in the battle of Carthage; and that many others, too numerous to mention, had fallen in divers engagements.

Dade's sons, all except Bud, were killed at Pilot Knob.

Over across Big River there lived a small, keen-eyed man named Sam Hilderbrand. Old man Bardsdell unfortunately gave a party of Federal soldiers information regarding Sam, and they decided to go in a body and take him. On the way the men got an overdose of liquor and reached the cabin in a drunken state. Sam's mother and wife who were alone at the time, resented the insults heaped upon them by the intoxicated soldiers. The result was that both women were murdered and the cabin burned.

Sam Hilderbrand and his brother Frank became infuriated at the outrage. They organized a small band of desperate men like themselves, and terrorized the country for miles around.

They soon found out that Bardsdell was the informant, and, therefore, chargeable with the shameful raid on Sam's home. One morning, Sam and Frank rode up to the Bardsdell gate, called him out and shot him dead. They then threw the body back into the house and set fire to it. The outbuildings were not spared, but Mrs. Bardsdell and a faithful old servant managed to escape to the woods.

The authorities hunted down the band of guer-

rillas and succeeded in capturing all except Sam and his brother. A few months afterwards they caught Frank Hilderbrand, five miles east of Bonne Terre, in Shake Rag Settlement, — he was hanged and his body thrown into a well.

Sam remained at large, considering practically everyone his enemy. Although squads of soldiers hunted him day and night, few really cared to meet up with him, for he had a reputation far and wide as the best shot in the state. He called his trustworthy rifle "Kill Devil," and boasted that every time he killed a man, he filed a notch on the long barrel. In a short time, there were supposed to be twenty-seven notches on Kill Devil. Many threatened to kill Sam, but he went about with comparative boldness, thinning out his imaginary enemies one by one.

It is said of Hilderbrand that he was informed of a certain man's threat to kill him at sight. He cut a rough likeness of the man on an oak tree, and stepping off 200 yards, put a ball into the image's head. Then he went to the man's house and forced him to follow to the lonely spot in the forest. Having arrived, Sam explained the carving and target practice, and despite pleadings, he shot the unfortunate man, leaving the body beneath the tree, with a note reading:

"So be it to all that cross my path."

"Sam Hilderbrand."

Notwithstanding the fact that he lay in the underbrush near Knob Lick and counted 150 Federal soldiers who had been sent to capture him and his supposed second band of "bush-whackers," Sam coolly returned to Bonne Terre with the avowed intention of shooting Donald Douglas and two other men from St. Louis. He got the two men, but Douglas succeeded in escaping—thanks to Silas Dade, who alone remained on Sam's list of friends. Sam, however, never suspected Dade. A little later the outlaw burned the little mining plant.

Thus in a whirlwind of disasters, Bonne Terre wore mourning for her sons, and was blighted in the very beginning of her career. Many of the backwoods' families among her population, imagining that they had incurred Hilderbrand's displeasure, moved into the retreats of the hill never to return. Only four widely scattered houses and Dade's store remained. The only signs of life—a few women and children and saddened old Silas Dade—reminded an occasional straggler of the past, and kept the name of the site for future generations.

One of the four houses was that of the Birsches.

Mr. Birsch did not dare return so long as Sam Hilderbrand roamed about. The family's money was about all gone, but Mrs. Birsch and Flora stayed on and deprived themselves of everything except bare necessities in order to care for Theresa. Mrs. Bardsdell, also, lived with them.

Theresa for six months hovered between life and death. Flora and her mother had lost all hope of Donald Douglas ever coming back to his wife, for since Hilderbrand's sacking of the place, he took care to remain in St. Louis whither he had gone at Dade's suggestion. No news had been received from Dan Douglas since he went away to join Price's Army. Therefore, when Mrs. Douglas recovered, the objects of her search were no longer at Bonne Terre. She considered herself very fortunate to have found such friends as Mrs. Birsch and Flora—her long illness and helpless dependence had won for the sympathetic hearts of both women in the same measure. Mrs. Bardsdell and Silas were also friends.

Theresa had completely changed. Her hair was white, and the once round face now elongated and cleansed of all bitterness smiled quietly on a new though still somber outlook of life. An expression of confidence softened her eyes despite the uneasiness of the times. Day after day, during the

two blanching years that dragged on, she sat on the veranda and read, or talked with her companions. She never recalled the first day of her illness, never spoke of the past; so Flora and her mother preferred to ignore it also, and look upon the frail old lady as if they had known her always.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FALL OF RICHMOND.

ALTHOUGH Frank Bardsdell and his son Joe had joined the Union and lost their lives in its cause, the father who was a Virginian by birth, was deeply attached to his native state and taught his children to love all its glorious traditions. The Bardsdells came of a fine old colonial family, and notwithstanding the fact that he and his wife settled in Missouri, Frank Bardsdell always said that his little daughter should have a good Southern education. Mrs. Bardsdell held the same view; she wished Virginia to learn the ways and acquire the culture of Southern ladies, hence it was that the young girl was sent to Richmond just before the war.

The first vacation, she managed to visit her mother and father, in Missouri, but after that, on account of the activities of the Cumberland Army with the Confederates, cross-country travel became hazardous, and Virginia remained in Richmond, at her mother's old home. Grandfather

Brewer was dead, but Grandmother welcomed Virginia and was but too happy of the chance to introduce her into desirable circles in the city where the Brewer name was a household word for honor and social prestige.

Elmwood Seminary, in which Virginia pursued her studies, soon taught her to drop the backwood's dialect. The school also awoke in her high ideals and a keen sense of a good woman's usefulness. Just before General Grant's army invested the fortifications protecting Richmond, the Seminary shortened its term by two months, giving the usual commencement entertainments and exercises, and issuing diplomas to the graduating class. Virginia was one of the graduates who reflected credit upon the institution by the excellence of their records.

Some months before the siege of Petersburg and desultory fighting in Virginia, Jean François and a band of wretched prisoners had managed to escape from Libby Prison. Their sufferings had been so great that they preferred death to a continuance of the horrible existence they had endured for nearly two years. Death did overtake most of them. Those who eluded capture and shooting, starved in swamps and glades. Only ten emaciated men finally made their way singly to safety.

One of the ten was Jean François. He wandered far before he dared show his face in daylight and at last reached Grant's army. Although his term of enlistment had expired and he was far from his original command, he begged to be taken into the ranks that he might stand once more in the firing line. The officer he applied to accepted him, and he again marched and fought under the Stars and Stripes.

General Grant gradually advanced westward from Petersburg, and the undaunted and unconquered Sheridan, with a large body of cavalry, kept up a continual threatening of the railroads over which Lee received supplies. The Confederate general, John P. Gordon, tried to break through Grant's line and even succeeded in carrying Fort Stedman by storm on March 25th, 1865, but as overwhelming numbers burst upon him the fortifications had to be abandoned. Sheridan on the 1st of April routed the Confederates at Five Forks, a fort that protected the railroad twelve miles southeast of Petersburg, and carried all the outposts after desperate fighting. Gen. A. P. Hill was killed in the attack. That night Lee's army, more or less shattered and disheartened, fled from Petersburg and Richmond. Before the last army corps left Richmond, the Confederates set fire to

the great tobacco warehouses. The conflagration leaped from street to street and spread over the entire business district which was soon a roaring furnace beyond human control.

The next morning, April 3rd, 1865, at about three o'clock, when the advance guard of Grant's Army entered the city, the heavens were aglow with the lurid flames that consumed the Capital of the Confederacy. There was booming of heavy cannonading in the direction of Petersburg, and the rumble of marching thousands sounded a death knell to the greatest civil war of modern times. Pandemonium prevailed in every part of the South's proudest city. A horde of refugees, with hastily bundled belongings, ran ahead of the invaders, while screaming women in night attire and hair flowing ran through side streets. Many of the old and feeble fell on their knees and prayed for deliverance, and seemed surprised that the dust-covered, battle-torn "Blue Coats" did not shoot them. When the sun came up to shame the glare of the burning buildings, the city was overrun by a host of Grant's victorious army and the United States Flag waved in triumph over the City Hall.

Jean François was in the advance column that marched into Richmond. Although a citizen of

Missouri and a volunteer in the Army of the Cumberland, the young man's earnestness had procured for him an enlistment in Grant's army for one year, or until the end of the war. During the last two weeks' fighting before the defenses of Richmond, several acts of signal bravery commended him to his general and secured for François promotion to the rank of captain.

Once the troops took possession of the city and something like order was restored, commands were issued for the soldiers to go out in squads and demand breakfast of the residents. When it came to François's turn, his company scattered about in a rather pretentious neighborhood—six or ten to a house—and asked that breakfast be prepared for them. Captain François and five men presented themselves at the door of Mrs. Brewer, who received them herself with the polite but severe dignity of a Southern lady when she believes herself imposed on. They were asked to be seated in the drawing room while she saw that the meal was cooked.

Many of the negro servants, in the belief that the Yankees were their deliverers, ran away to the Union lines upon the evacuation of the city by the Confederates. Mrs. Brewer's servants having been swept away in the general panic, she and Virginia

were obliged to cook breakfast for the soldiers and serve it as well.

This went hard with both women. Mrs. Brewer was a devoted daughter of the Confederacy and looked upon the Blue Coats as enemies to everything dear to her. Notwithstanding that Virginia's father and brother had given themselves to the Federal Cause, she shared her grandmother's views most ardently and had wept with her friends when the gallant Boys in Gray had to leave Richmond at the mercy of the North.

It was therefore a cold, formal, because-they-had-to reception that young captain François and his companions received. When breakfast was ready, Mrs. Brewer went to the drawing room door and announced to the captain and his men that they could follow her to the dining room.

François sat at the end of the table. It was the first time in two years that he had taken a meal in a house. He allowed his eyes to roam about the richly appointed room and to drink in its fresh, homelike atmosphere. Never had he seen anything so luxurious. Then he wondered what sort of people lived in such a home. Just as he made up his mind to scrutinize the mistress of the place, Mrs. Brewer, clad in a becoming morning dress,

came in carrying a large platter of ham and eggs. She said in a frigid tone of voice:

"On the approach of your army, sirs, all my servants fled, and I and my granddaughter are thereby obliged to assume the roles of cooks and servants to you, and your men." Her eyes were directed on François.

"It never occurred to me before this hour," she continued, "that I, a daughter of the South, a Confederate, and an ardent admirer of everything Southern, should be forced to serve Yankees."

The captain flushed. The men were so hungry that they continued eating and ignored the rebuke.

"Madam," said François with dignity, "I am sorry to trouble you. My men and I have had nothing to eat since yesterday at midday, and then, only a small portion of hard-tack. We are hungry and worn out by many days of marching and fighting, and are obeying orders in coming here, although, in a high-handed fashion, I admit. I repeat, I am sorry."

Mrs. Brewer, despite her uncompromising loyalty to the South even in that dark hour of defeat, could not think of letting anyone in distress, or suffering of hunger, go unattended. She felt ashamed that she had complained with a taunt.

"Oh! I did not mean, sirs, that I begrudge you the food. There is no hospitality that equals the Southerner's."

"So I have always understood, but this is the first meal I have sat down to in a Southern home —as to that, in any house at all for two years or more."

The ham and eggs were soon exhausted in ample helpings, and Virginia brought in the coffee and hot biscuits.

"How does that happen?" asked the lady of the house after she had assisted Virginia in passing the bread and serving the coffee.

"I spent over eighteen months in Libby Prison. I was taken at Chicamauga by the Confederates, and somehow, by shifting and forced retreats I finally got to that horrible death hole. I escaped and made my way back to the army."

"Then you've suffered for your beliefs; they must be genuine since you are fighting in the ranks once more."

"Yes, suffered Madam, and I'm fighting that you and all in this land may be citizens of the greatest united republic in the world."

Virginia brought more hot biscuit.

Mrs. Brewer for the first time since she had let them in, took the pains to look closely at her en-

forced visitors. They were not at all a bad looking lot. The five soldiers—beardless boys—appeared quite decent. They were blue-eyed Pennsylvania lads, and from their manners, evidently from good Northern homes. They must have had careful mothers. As to the captain himself, she admitted that he was a very handsome man. Her heart softened a little.

She went back to the kitchen and after a few minutes returned with another plate of ham and eggs.

Virginia put her head in the door:

"Grandma, perhaps the gentlemen would like our peach preserves—may I bring some?"

"Yes, Virgie, and some more hot biscuit, please."

Captain François, on hearing Virginia's rich, sympathetic voice started involuntarily and turned to look at the speaker. He had noticed a young lady in and out a time or two, but had been so intent upon satisfying his gnawing hunger that he had not so much as glanced up at her. When he did look, her back was turned to him as she was leaving the room after taking in the preserves. He saw only the neat, graceful form of a young girl, in a dainty, flowered morning dress.

Mrs. Brewer directed her attention to the soldiers again, and noticed their perfect table man-

ners. She ventured to address one who happened to look her way.

"Have you also been unfortunate in your soldiering?"

"If you mean, Madam, have I been in Libby Prison? I am glad to say I have not. But I have seen hard service all the same. Considering the number of battles I've been in, I suppose I've had my share of hardships."

"And you are very young."

"Old enough to fight, all right."

"How long have you been in the army?"

"Four years."

"Great God! and to think he must have killed any number of our boys in gray!"

"It's been part of our duty, Madam, and I can say that they have done all in their power to kill me—I have been wounded severely three times. Each of my four comrades bears wounds, and as for our captain, he's just told you about the prison, but he's gone through a jolly lot besides.

"Ahem!" sighed Mrs. Brewer, for lack of anything better to say. She was quite disarmed by the uncomplaining, gentlemenly manners of her guests. As the thought passed through her mind, she regarded them more kindly. Surely, it was not supposed, nor generally known, that the

Northern Army had in its ranks young men of this caliber.

Indeed, it was only after several years' determined fighting that the North and the South discovered they were brothers exterminating each other. Could they have but realized the fact sooner, many thousand of lives would have been saved, and untold suffering avoided. But pacific settlement of great differences is not always God's way. Frailty of humanity required that redemption should come through suffering and death on the Cross; so great empires and bonds of brotherhood in liberty must be established and perpetuated through the shedding of blood in triumphant battles.

Virginia came in and busied herself in dispensing the peach preserves. As the jars were sealed no one had liked to serve himself to the delicacy.

Captain François leaned forward and studied the girl intently—could he be mistaken? No; surely it was Virginia Bardsdell, had she not left the hills to go to Richmond?

Mrs. Brewer observed the eager searching of Virginia's face and was much annoyed. Just as she was trying to think of some way to indicate her displeasure, François arose and took a step towards her granddaughter.

"I am sure you are Miss Virginia Bardsdell," he said bowing.

Virginia looked at him in surprised inquiry.

"I can't be mistaken—there is no doubt of it," he persisted.

Blushing and confused almost to the point of resentment, the young girl looked at the big, broad-chested six foot soldier, without the slightest sign of recognition; in fact, she was sure she had never seen until then that smoothly-shaven face. Yet his calm, penetrating black eyes and something in the quality of his voice seemed to say to her: "You have known me, think well." The honest and frank bearing of the speaker prevented any annoyance. Virginia, in a puzzled tone, said:

"Yes, of course, I am Virginia Bardsdell, but who—?"

"You do not recognize me at all, Miss Bardsdell?"

The grandmother and the soldiers paused, very much interested in this turn of affairs.

Virginia shook her head slowly as if sorry.

"I shall not try your patience further—

"I am Captain Jean François whom you have known in the hills of Missouri."

"Is it possible!" and Virginia sprang forward

with outstretched palm. "How could you expect me to know you without your beard?"

"Oh, is that it?" queried François laughing. "I cut it before I left Bonne Terre and had quite forgotten I ever wore one."

"Yes, that's it," cried Virginia. "I could not place your face although your eyes and something in your voice made me hesitate. I never would have believed that I could forget your face for I have thought so often of you."

It was François's turn to color slightly—hadn't she said: "I have thought of you so often?"

"Grandma," she ran on gaily, and quite unconscious of the nature of her remark: "this is the bully—I mean the gentleman bully of our hills. Haven't I told you often about him? How wonderful! how perfectly wonderful! Now Captain François, think of it! Oh, I was forgetting:

"Captain François, my grandmother, Mrs. Brewer."

"It is a great pleasure, Mrs. Brewer, to make your acquaintance," continued the captain bowing very low. "This is indeed a most surprising turn, one of the unexpected things one reads about but never believes in,—meeting a charming young lady friend and her grandmother, hundreds of miles from home, and in the very seat of war."

"I am so pleased to know you, Captain François; indeed, Virgie has told me many things about you, and I understand now why you have made such a brave soldier and how you deserved promotion."

The captain now introduced his comrades, and related to them a few snatches of events back in Missouri.

"Oh! Captain François," Virginia interrupted, in such a changed voice, that a hush fell on the assembly, "I see from the way you're talking that you do not know what has happened in Bonne Terre."

"No; I've not had a word from there since I left."

"Poor Joe was killed in battle—he fought on your side, you know he was a Federal."

"Yes."

"And"—her face became white, her eyes dilated, and with a sudden movement she turned away and went and stood at the farther end of the room with her back turned—looking out of the window.

François watched her for a minute then Mrs. Brewer spoke in an awed voice:

"It seems that a very bad man out there, Sam Hilderbrand, murdered her father in cold blood, and burnt their home." That was all the good

old lady could manage to say, an expression of horror overspread her features. Virginia had heard and François could see that she could scarcely keep from falling. She had clutched the back of a chair. François would have liked to go up to her and express his sympathy but instead he looked blankly about him and the words choked in his throat.

The soldiers had bowed their heads.

Virginia came back slowly toward the group.

"That is not all," she said, each word sounded as if it were gasped, "Silas Dade lost four sons in battle, at Pilot Knob,—Bud is the only one left. The same terrible man killed a score or more of people—and there are just four houses left—and Dade's Store. The mining plant's gone, too, and Mr. Douglas is in St. Louis, hiding from—" she could not mention Hilderbrand's name.

All these disasters overwhelmed François. He, in turn, walked to the window, his head bowed, and then he looked out—far over and beyond the burning city—in the direction of his home. He had not spoken a single word. Virginia was too much overcome by her emotion to watch him, but Mrs. Brewer read the genuine sorrow that each of Virginia's words had stamped on his features. She recognized the futility of anyone saying, "I'm

sorry," at the recital of such misfortunes.

Remembering his duty, François squared his shoulders and faced about bravely. In a few appropriate words he thanked Mrs. Brewer and Virginia for their kindness to him and his men. Then he informed the older lady that he expected to pay her for the food he and his men had eaten.

"I shall not accept pay, Captain. I shouldn't think of it. I am sure you received no such orders from your superior officer and please do not offend me by mentioning it again."

"Then, we have indeed enjoyed Southern hospitality," replied François gallantly, "and in taking our leave, please accept repeated thanks from your devoted servant. If there is anything—"

"There is no need to mention so slight a service —a duty—to a hungry soldier whether of the North or South." Mrs. Brewer resumed her look of dignified reserve for a few seconds then her manner became more amiable:

"If you're off duty this evening, Captain François, Virgie and I will expect you to dine with us."

The captain bowed low again and assured his hostess that if it were in his power to come she might expect him. Then he bade good-bye for the time, and hurried off with his companions to join his command.

CHAPTER XIV.

PEACE.

THAT same evening, Captain François, wearing his dress-parade uniform, new and glittering with trimmings and brass buttons, presented himself at Mrs. Brewer's residence. During the day a courier had brought a note containing his formal acceptance of the invitation to dinner, at seven o'clock, and conveying also the information that a special leave had been granted for the occasion.

When he rang the door bell, Mrs. Brewer's old black servant, Dinah, let him in and escorted him into the drawing room,—Dinah had decided that "Missus" was preferable to Yankees "an' a passel of common niggers," and had therefore, returned to her "home" in time to prepare dinner for Miss Virgie's nice "young man." Virginia never knew how Dinah had come to hear about him.

Mrs. Brewer and her granddaughter entered a few minutes later, and extended their guest a most cordial welcome. On the way over to the house, a feeling of embarrassment—a certain uncomfor-

tableness—had come over François, but the wholeheartedness with which he was received, and the easy tackle-and-take conversation that ensued without previous planning, dissipated his reserve. He forgot that he was a "guest" in a "Southern home," it seemed that his own dear mother had been transported into the elegant apartment and magnificent surroundings. As for Virginia, she was charming in manner, and healthy and perfectly natural in word and bearing. She talked easily and interestingly without the least self-consciousness.

The three soon dropped into reminiscences of ante-bellum days, François and Virginia conversing of Bonne Terre while Mrs. Brewer listened and occasionally put in a word—her daughter, Mrs. Bardsdell, had always proved a good correspondent and kept her informed of the development of the place.

Virginia suddenly laughed:

"Why, you don't seem to notice that I don't speak backwoods dialect any more?"

François was a little embarrassed.

"Oh! you needn't look like that," she cried gaily, "I don't mind. When I think of it I always laugh. Poor Grandma! when I first came,

she tried so hard to break me of it without hurting my feelings!"

"Yes, I did notice," said François politely refraining from a smile at her outbreak, "and all day I was trying to recall some of your pet expressions that night at Dade's Inn—for that is really the only time we—we talked to each other, I mean that we got acquainted. You left home one week after that and we never met until this morning."

"Did you remember any?"

"I don't think I'd miss a single one."

"Then do repeat them for Grandma's benefit. I'd like to hear them, but do you know that I've made her a solemn promise to drop them forever?" Again she laughed unrestrainedly.

Mrs. Brewer seemed happy to see her throw off the gloom that had oppressed her since news of the disasters at Bonne Terre had reached them.

"That would be mocking you," replied François, "How can I think of doing such a thing?"

"You need not 'mock', that's not exactly the word for it. Just repeat part of our conversation at Dade's Inn, as you remember it. Please do."

François glanced at Mrs. Brewer. The dear old lady smiled reassuringly over her spectacles, and her soft gray eyes granted permission as she leaned

back in her chair after smoothing her sleek bandeaux, a single hair of which was never allowed to be disturbed, and she placed her hands on the arms of her fauteuil in an attitude of repose.

François felt that it would be impolite for him to refuse. An idea came to him, and he prefaced his recitation by explaining that the scene was laid at Dade's Inn—Mrs. Brewer must surely have heard of Dade's Inn—and it was after midnight supper at a dance.

"The following dialogue took place between a young man and a valley girl:

" 'What have you been doing to-day, Miss Virginia?'

" 'Next to nuthin'—Mam an' Pap, they'ns went over to the mill to tote corn, an' I come nigh hevin' a fit les' they'ns'd git home late.'

" 'It looks as if you really wanted to come to the dance.'

" 'Ghee whizz! you bet I did!'

" 'I don't suppose there is much in that line going on in the hills.'

" 'Nope. We'uns don't hev much fun, but yer bet whin somethin' does come 'long, looky here, I'm—I haint *I*, if I don't go.'

" 'Do you like to talk to young men, or do you prefer the girls?'

"'Now don't that knock yer persimmon—'course, I'd rather chin with a boy—them'se my sentiments long as you've put it straight. Don't *you* like the gals?'

"'I don't know—unless you mean yourself?'

"'Huh! you're a funny one. Most boys come right out with it. Gals is gals until they make up their mind to pick out one.'

"'Some don't take long to make up their mind.'"

Grandma was shaking with laughter. Virginia got up and put one arm about Mrs. Brewer's neck:

"Now, Capt. François. you're not taking *me* off one bit. You've mimicked the couple that sat next to us at the supper table," and she raised a finger in warning, "If you're going to let Grandma believe I'd say such silly nonsense—" then she broke out in ringing laughter just as François was beginning to feel he'd made a fool of himself. He finally joined in the merriment.

"But Grandma," she cried as soon as she regained her composure, "Captain François reproduced that conversation just as it took place. I remember every word of it and I wonder how he could get it so exactly when he never spoke the dialect himself."

"I did not like to mention it, Captain François, but since Virgie is alluding to it, your language and manners do not agree with the impression I've had of—"

"I see," interrupted François, noting the lady's hesitation, "Miss Virginia, I spoke the backwoods' dialect until I was fifteen; then, like you, education came to my assistance and taught me the proper use of English words. But the fact that I no longer speak that way does not mean that I would criticize or ridicule our good backwoodsmen. I was only giving Mrs. Brewer a—"

At this juncture, Dinah came to the door and announced dinner.

They passed into the richly appointed dining room where was spread on the table such a feast as can be prepared only by an old black mammy of the South. How she manages it no one knows, and the mystery deepens when her kitchen is inspected. Therein is such a maze of pots and pans and materials, mixed and otherwise—and it would appear to the on-looker at first sight, none too clean, but woe to whoever would dare suggest such a thing! How it is possible for Dinah or Rose or Jane or Malinda to bring out of that confusion any sort of dinner is a puzzle. Well, it's best not to look in the kitchen at all, but what-

ever Mammy prepares is always delicious and served in perfect style. The table on this particular evening excelled anything Captain François had ever seen in any of his wanderings.

As the meal went on, Virginia, at the Captain's request, related something of her days at the Seminary. He was delighted to find that she had proven herself to be an enthusiastic student, and had derived from the course the real essentials of an academic education. Topics of more or less serious character came in for passing discussion, and he was deeply interested in her handling of them.

As Virginia talked away, animated and becomingly flushed, her simple beauty and unaffected manners impressed themselves anew on his heart. The old feelings—locked up on a certain day, far up in the loneliness of the hills when he had talked with Basil—struggled for freedom. The call set him dreaming again and he lost himself in the music of her voice.

But as a tempest in the night breaks upon the moon-kissed ocean and flays its peaceful calm, his dream ended in distressed confusion. A turn in the conversation dissipated François's reverie. Quite suddenly in the middle of some remark, Virginia broke off and asked in a slightly tremulous voice:

"Capt. François, do you by any chance, know anything of the whereabouts of Dan Douglas?"

Was it the sensing of anxiety in her tone, or was it the lightning flight of his memory back to that evening when he had sat on the "front porch" and watched Virginia and Dan Douglas as they walked in the meadow path, that caused a dull ache in his heart? His eyes sought her, and as she looked she knew he had discovered her secret. The burning flash of his eyes was followed by a quiet glance, but she felt her cheeks flush and hastened to add:

"For three years I heard from him regularly. Then his letters came less often—as the army got into action, I suppose—and now it has been six months since he wrote."

The words seemed to cost an effort and François felt guilty, as if his peeping into her heart had forced her to a sort of explanation. He addressed himself to her question:

"No; as I stated before, I have not heard from Bonne Terre since I enlisted, and, as we are serving on opposite sides it is not possible nor likely that—"

"Oh! how silly of me! Of course not, how could you have any communication with him! I must have had it in mind that you might have

heard through Mr. Dade, for instance. But there again, you did not even know he had lost his sons, so—"

"You must excuse Virginia," explained Mrs. Brewer, "she is naturally worried, being so fond of Mr. Douglas."

"Oh! Grandma!"

"Why, Virgie, you seemed to be so well acquainted with Captain François, doesn't he know you're engaged to Dan Douglas?" continued the old lady innocently. Virginia did not answer.

François saw how it had come about—the engagement had not been announced in the Ozarks the way Grandmother Brewer would have announced it to her circle of friends and acquaintances.

He preferred not to enlighten further the correct Southern ladies on the etiquette of the hills so he interposed quickly:

"Mr. Douglas is probably safe with his regiment, for I do not believe Price's Army has had any hard fighting. Probably they are marching and there is a temporary cutting off of communications."

"I hope it may be so. Since Grandma has unintentionally let you into my secret, I don't mind.

You are one of our home young men, anyway, aren't you?"

"Of course, I am, and a backwoodsman besides," he said soothingly but not daring to look at her.

"We have been worried and imagined all sorts of things that were likely to happen to a soldier," persisted Grandma.

"Yes," said Virginia, recovering from her annoyance at Mrs. Brewer's simple directness—after all why should she mind when, as Grandma said, they were engaged?—"I am very fond of Dan, and I know he loves me and would write if he could. He has been punctual, and thoughtful of me at all times, although he does not know all that has happened to Mother and me. So, if he did know he would write at once unless, as you say, the communications are cut off. That must surely be the reason."

François was happy that he had given her some comfort by suggesting that possibility.

"Yes," he assured her, "and most likely the mails have been intercepted by our army."

Just then there was a clatter of horses' feet in the deserted street, and a bugle blew "Boots and Saddles."

Captain François was all attention. He listened.

The bugle sounded again, and he ran to the door followed by the ladies.

"You there, Harvey?"

"Yes, Captain. You're wanted in the column. I took this means of calling you because I didn't remember the house, only the neighborhood. Here's your horse. I'm sorry, but time's short."

Captain François bade the ladies a hurried farewell, and was soon galloping down the street.

Grant had ordered the main part of the army out of Richmond in the general advance on Lee's army towards Appomatox. Captain François's division was included in this movement.

General Lee, with the tattered remnants of the grand army that had engaged the powerful forces of the North at Gettysburg, had retreated towards Lynchburg, along the north side of Appomatox River, in an endeavor to reach the mountains. General Grant led the large Federal forces in person, while a cloud of cavalry cut off the Confederates' retreat. Lee's provision trains were captured, and, at last, on the 9th of April, 1865, the great Southern leader was overtaken with only 8,000 starved men, and surrounded by the entire Union Army. He knew the end had come. His proud soldiers, like ancient Spartans, had done their best, and laying down their arms could not

dim their honor. A brief council was held near the quaint little Appomatox Court House, and Lee decided to surrender. Grant's terms were generous, and Lee accepted them unconditionally.

The Federal chief was kind in his hour of triumph. The Confederate officers were permitted to retain their swords, and the men their horses and personal property. Grant told them to go till the soil and be good citizens.

In the eulogy of the Federal Army of the Potomac, by a Northern historian, this is what he says of Lee's Army:

> "Nor can there fail to arise the image of that other army that was the adversary of the Army of the Potomac, and which—who can ever forget that once looked upon it?—that army of tattered uniforms and bright muskets—that body of incomparable infantry, the Army of Northern Virginia, which for four long years carried the revolt upon its bayonets—opposing a constant front to the mighty concentration of power brought against it; which, receiving terrible blows, did not fail to give the like, and which, vital in all its parts, died only with its annihilation."

Other Confederate generals surrendered quickly, and the South accepted the dictates of Fate and returned to the Union of States.

Peace spread her wings over the land.

During the days of marching, Captain François fought out a war with himself. His old love for Virginia awoke with great vigor when he found her in the ill-fated city, and the discovery

that she owned herself pledged to a man whom he had come to distrust, only tempted him the more to try to win her for his wife. And why did he distrust Dan Douglas? He could not exactly tell. One minute he declared vehemently that the young St. Louisian should never wed Virginia; then he condemned himself—for on what grounds could he presume to interfere with the happiness of the young man?—Moreover, had Virginia not declared that she was fond of him?—Finally, the noble generosity of François's nature calmed the storm, and persuaded him to fetter his secret and lock it again in that inner chamber known only to himself and God.

And again there was peace in his heart.

CHAPTER XV.

THE HOME-COMING.

JUNE smiled upon the peaceful hills of Bonne Terre. Wild grasses and flowers sprang up to hide the charred ruins of homes. Birds sang gaily as they fed their nested young. Cowbells jingled on the range, and the ploughman once more drew rein in the furrows. Muskets and guns having been laid aside, the few war-scarred veterans returned to take their places in civil life.

The last rays of the setting sun were casting their shafts over the summit of Blue Hill when Jean François came out in the open and looked down on the deserted village. Although, in a way, he expected to find some changes, he was not quite prepared for the scene of desolation spread before him. He saw only four houses and the blackened smoke-stack of the mining plant. Dade's General Store stood apart like a monument to the past. His eyes sought his own cozy cabin, but it, too, had disappeared. There,

however, was the guide-post to where it had stood: the squatting, ivy-clad chimney of his father's hut that stood guard over his parents' grave and reminded of the changing vicissitudes of this world,—how much had happened as he reviewed his career back to the days of his happy boyhood!

He leaned against a friendly oak and wiped the perspiration from his brow. Wonderingly, he went over the landscape again, putting back from memory everything as it was before he left. At last he spoke aloud, asking and answering a question which was:

"Among those who remain, have I one friend?"

"Yes," was the unhesitating response, "Silas Dade."

And at the same time the remembrance of blue eyes that had bade him a wistful good-bye flashed on his consciousness and he looked in the direction of the Birsch homestead, yes, the place was there, it was one of the four houses left.

"I can always count on Uncle Si," he repeated, ignoring the suggestion of possibly others being interested in him. Jean directed his steps towards Dade's place.

That day another came home. At noon a wagon halted in front of the spot where had stood

the Bardsdell house. Virginia alighted and after a few minutes' hesitation walked over the place. She had nerved herself for this visit and strove heroically to remain composed. The old driver shook his head sorrowfully as he watched her pick her way across the bleached foundations, her skirt carefully held up as she stepped among the brambles and vines. Ned Dockart drew out his pipe and puffed clouds of smoke so as to distract his mind from the black-clad figure by the ruins, occasionally he tugged at his white beard. Virginia stepped across into the garden. Neglected roses blossomed, and the climbing ones—their supports fallen to the ground—trailed along the earth. She picked a few after a good deal of thorn pricking and placed them in the midst of the brambles that overran the charred remains of her home. Then she started over to the orchard. Her favorite apple-tree had lost more than half of its sturdy boughs. The same flames that had destroyed the green-shuttered house had spread to the out-buildings and dared attack the trees near by. It was useless to try to find one thing that had escaped whole, so, with a sigh, she turned away and went back along the flat stones that formed the walk from the front porch to the gate. Before reaching the wagon she gave a last look.

She covered her face with her hands and wept convulsively. Ned looked around uneasily but concluding that he could do no good by talking, he busied himself nursing his rheumatic knee and when he wore out at the task, he nagged at the old horse as a sort of reminder of his presence.

When darkness came on, Virginia was settled with her mother in the Birsch house, enjoying Mrs. Bardsdell's mothering as she took her daughter in her arms whenever fresh tears would start at the mention of some occurrence of misfortune she had thought fit to conceal from Virginia and Mrs. Brewer at the time. But there was a great deal of happiness in their meeting, and Mrs. Bardsdell would suddenly hold her daughter away from her at arm's-length and look at her with pride. Then Virginia would blush and laugh and hide her face on her mother's shoulder.

And François—Captain François—sat up late with Silas, Mam, and Bud, listening and relating in turn, and comparing notes of his various experiences with Dade's son.

The changes in Bonne Terre were much greater than François at first supposed. Some of the disasters had been told him by Virginia and Mrs. Brewer;—more he discovered; and still there were others. Sam Hilderbrand had killed several of

the old-timers, and their farms were nearly all abandoned, their families having moved away or sought the fastness of secluded hollows far up in the hills. The very few who remained in the neighborhood of Bonne Terre looked suspiciously at Captain François whenever they met on the road. It must be remembered that he was a Yankee and that even before the war many had looked askance at him. They were strong sympathizers with the South, so besides the old grievance against Paul François's son, there was cause for feeling. Captain François was once more a stranger in his home land. And few tried to conceal the fact from him. Of those who had known him in the old days, Silas Dade and his family were the only ones on whose friendship he could count. They had remained steadfast and true.

One day as François was reflecting on his present standing in the surroundings of Bonne Terre and in the community of the little town itself—such as it was then—his mind reverted to his old chum back in the wilds. At once he decided to find him, if possible. As soon as he could get away he hastened to their accustomed meeting place. It was scarcely to be expected that Basil would be there. Still François waited until the sun's sha-

dow passed well beyond the hump on the bench before he headed for the hermit's retreat.

The old trapper, in his usual hunting accouterments, and somewhat older looking, but quite vigorous and strong, was seated in the shade of his cabin reading a well-thumbed history of the French Revolution when Dijon attracted his attention. The faithful and intelligent animal, also showing a marked advance in years, placed his paws on his master's knees and barked with his head turned towards the trail. Basil's keen eyes, shaded by shaggy eye-brows flecked with white, shot a gleam of surprise. Then turning to the open window he threw his book upon his kitchen table. Dijon was for going down the trail, but instead, the old Frenchman advanced to the edge of the cliff and peered over. He was not long in descrying a figure toiling up the rocky way. His hands were soon clapping in great glee a fandango for Dijon and he cried: "It's my son!" The animal whose movements were becoming heavy on account of age wriggled with delight as he watched his master, and gave an occasional bark.

François was now near enough to observe his hunting mate's delight, so he shouted using his hands for a megaphone:

"Vive l'Amérique!"

"Oui! Vive l'Amérique! rolled down to him from the crag. *"Vive l'Amérique!"*

"Soyez le bien-venu, mon fils!" cried Basil as François stepped on the ledge of the cliff after his arduous ascent. *"Vive l'Amérique!"* and the tall fur cap was tossed in the air to be picked up by Dijon who thought he must take part in the demonstration of joy. After some playful scrambling Basil recovered his head-gear and turned to his young friend.

The meeting was touching. Neither of them could say anything now that they stood face to face. But Basil, large tears of gladness glistening in his eyes and rolling down in his scanty white beard, seized the massive young man by the shoulders and kissed him on both cheeks.

After a while he led François to his cabin and drawing out a stool next to the big arm chair in which he pushed his visitor, he sat down and rested his arms across the young man's knees.

"Now, Jean, tell me the story—the glorious story! My son, at times I feared you lay dead on the battle field, then again I hoped—for this day. Speak, Jean, tell me all."

"From the very beginning?"

"Yes."

He listened, as it would have appeared to an

on-looker, with his eyes as well as his ears, so intent was he on François's every gesture; he hung on his lips, burning with enthusiasm at the recital of some glorious charge, tears welling in his eyes at the thought of homes made desolate, his heart wrung with grief that the welding of the nation should have cost so many lives and caused so much misery.

"Ah, Jean!" he would then cry, "It will take another generation to reap the benefit, but it will be worth the struggle, and those who will come after us will never forget the cost. All those who took part, whether in the North or South, will be remembered and honored."

Again Basil would jump up when portions of François's narrative appealed to his imagination, and standing at attention, all the while, as if the scene were enacted in his presence, he would greet the climax with cries of "Vive l'Amérique!"

Basil always lapsed into French when moved by strong emotion.

When the young man finally succeeded in partially satisfying his curiosity regarding the movements of the regiment in which he was enrolled on his reënlistment, Basil spoke:

"*Mon bon fils,* it is all wonderful, and from your account I glean that you have acquitted yourself

like a brave soldier else you could not speak of it as you do, but now tell me more. I've been starved these three years for news of you, tell me of some of your personal experiences. Any promotion?"

"Captain," replied François modestly.

"Ah! Voila qui est bien! Capitaine François, je vous salue!"

The old man arose and suiting the action to the words, he saluted the young officer military style. After dancing about in great glee with Dijon at his heels, he resumed his seat and begged François to give him the minutest details of his share in the famous charge that had won him his promotion.

There was no help for it, and amid appreciative exclamations in French, the Captain told his story, omitting no incident. It was long past the hour for Basil to light his lamp when he realized that he was neglecting his duties as host. Just as suddenly as he had at times interrupted François in his enthusiastic admiration, he jumped up and declared they must have supper.

When he finished the preparations for the meal and they sat about the table it was the signal for another outburst of "Vive l'Amérique!" and "Tell me again about General Grant," amid snatches of martial songs of old French days.

It was a gala evening for Basil, but at last, ex-

hausted by so much unwonted excitement he sat silent for a long time. He looked at François gravely:

"My son," he finally said, "I am proud of you —my brave young captain—you have performed a duty to your country and generations yet unborn as becomes a citizen of this great republic. Now the wasted village yonder needs the services of a strong man. Though the wounds wrought by war may have steeled hearts against you, I know you will spend your time and your energy for them.

"Once I went with you to the edge of the valley, and pausing there, bade you give up the chase and devote your life to usefulness. You hearkened to an old man, a strange hermit, you have striven and covered your head with glory. Buckle on the armor again. Turn from war to civil activity for the good of the handful that remain. Go to them, make them love you. When you build a home, I shall come now and again and feast my eyes on my son."

This time François bowed in recognition of the soundness of Basil's advice.

The next morning he turned his face once more to Bonne Terre. When he had advanced far beyond the gorge he looked back and saw the white-

haired Frenchman still standing out on the high rock, the glow of the morning sun gilding his picturesque form. Basil saw François turn. The old man waved a blessing; then pointing to the green-clad mountains he seemed to bid them, by significant gestures, be friends to him who must struggle with them to wrench from their hearts the secrets they had guarded for ages.

CHAPTER XVI.

FRANÇOIS'S DIFFICULTIES.

LIFE in Bonne Terre was slow and uninteresting for some time. The small population left in the village and immediate country was insufficient for much activity, and the resultant lethargy after the great storm that swept over the land required several months' quietude and reflection to enable men and women to get back to normal. Then slowly they began to move about and think of reconstructing their homes.

Mr. Birsch ventured to show himself again among the deserted shafts of the pocket mines, and was soon joined by Donald Douglas. They invited miners to take out mineral; then it was hauled to the river and shipped. More miners were gradually brought down from St. Louis. Cottages hastily erected accommodated their families and started off the town on a new career.

Mrs. Bardsdell, through Mrs. Brewer's influence, induced a staunch young Virginia farmer to move to Missouri with his family. She permitted him

to build a substantial house on the foundations of the old Bardsdell homestead, and had erected for herself, Virginia, and her mother, who decided to leave Richmond and take up her abode in Bonne Terre, a nice dwelling on a choice plot of ground on the edge of the town.

A private school was opened by Captain Simpson Poston, the same individual who had fought with Joe Bardsdell over politics at the beginning of the war. An enterprising Catholic priest came, started a mission, and ultimately built a church. An excellent carpenter and builder, Jesse Elvins, put up a shop and began working for the company. Young Dr. Keith came and started his practice; so that little by little the necessary factors gathered about the settlement and formed a strong nucleus for further development.

François took one of the vacant places in Dade's broken family circle and labored untiringly with Adolf Birsch and Donald Douglas towards rehabilitating the mines. When François mentioned to Douglas something about taxes, he was informed that all taxes had been paid up to date and assured they would be kept up by the mining company as long as it operated.

All this advancement in the mines and the town was accomplished in less than eighteen months,

and started such a movement of progressiveness that Bonne Terre awoke to the expectation of a healthy, respectable future.

One member of the old colony, Dan Douglas, had not up to that hour been accounted for. No word had ever come from him. His father mourned him as dead, but Virginia, with love alive in her heart, dared to look for his return. She insisted it was impossible for one so kind and thoughtful at all times, to pass out of this world without leaving some token for her, and that while she admitted his absence most mysterious, he would appear some day with a satisfactory explanation.

Virginia proved to be right. Just after Bonne Terre attained a fairly prosperous position as a result of the boom described, Dan Douglas did return, hale and hearty, and as handsome and plausible as ever. The story he told was related with a flourish and dash, sprinkled with a *soupçon* of humility sufficient to give it the ring of truth. It satisfied the popular thirst for adventure, and Dan became a hero. Women lionized him, and his oft-repeated tale gained the prominence of being the most thrilling story brought back from the war.

The following synopsis gives an idea of Dan Douglas's varied experiences:—

He began with the explanation of how he was captured by Gen. Halleck on crossing over from Belmont, and how he kept on writing for a time, not wishing to press his misfortunes on others. One day, in an endeavor to escape a guard struck him on the head with the butt of his gun. Believing him dead, he was thrown into a river—presumably the Mississippi—and picked up by a raft. He rather thought he must have saved himself by clutching to the raft for he did not remember anyone being on it. Anyway, he landed far down in Arkansas, his memory perfectly blank. What queer things he must have done or said he left to the imagination of his listeners, but not without suggestion. A funny old hunter took him in charge and led him far into the interior, where he remained until a short time before his return home. Three months previous to that, a wandering Cherokee Indian had come along, and becoming interested in his story as told by the hunter, declared he could effect the restoration of his memory. On obtaining permission from the hunter to try his skill, the Red Man struck him on the head with his tomahawk. The old hunter believing the Indian had intended to murder his protegé shot the Cherokee on the spot. For a long time of course, three months, he was told, he lingered

near death's door, then, lo! he recovered and memory came trooping back and started the endless chain of recollections. As the proper link arrived before the clarifying window of his mind, he remembered Bonne Terre and all the rest.

Dan showed the scar on his head in confirmation of the latter part of his story.

"How perfectly wonderful!" cried everyone "Marvelous!"

But Captain Jean François doubted the tale.

Yes; François doubted Dan, though he chided himself for what he thought perverse jealousy on his part. However, he never told anyone of his suspicions, for what right had he, Jean François, to doubt the veracity of a young man who possessed so many good qualities as Donald Douglas's son? The story, even if it did border on the improbable, was possible. Such instances as a sudden blow restoring memory were recognized by science. Dan was apparently truthful in everything else, and why should he palm off on his home people, especially trusting Virginia, a yarn such as he had told? He might have added a few flourishes but the main facts must be true. "No," said François, "I am prejudiced against Dan because of my love for Virginia. It is mean of me and I must watch myself."

He did. Dan and he worked side by side in the mines for some time and nothing came up that could suggest Dan was other than a very upright, honorable young man.

But independent of his resolve, François's suspicions were aroused by a queer coincidence. On a trip to Ste. Genevieve in connection with shipments of lead, he met incidentally a United States officer of the Federal Court who was in search of escaped members of Wallace's Gang. François was naturally interested in his mission as the Gang was a strong organization of bandits who for many years had evaded capture by hiding in the swamps of Southeast Missouri where they had their rendezvous. It was supposed to consist of about 500 members—army deserters and fugitives from justice, in fact part of the flotsam cast up in war times. Finally, after their many depredations in various localities, the attention of the Federal Government was directed to the terrorizers, and a force sent against them. The nest was broken and most of the men taken. Those who escaped capture or managed to get away from their guards were hunted down one by one. The officer confided to François and the hotel keeper that he was looking out for a young man who was with the gang at the time most of the bandits

were captured. His exact connection with them had not been ascertained but the fact that he was with them rendered him liable to arrest. Billings —Dan Billings—the young man in question, had a narrow escape. In the melée he had been severely wounded in the head and, believing him to be helpless, the soldiers had gone ahead in pursuit of the living. When they returned to get him he had disappeared. He was manded at the trial of the men as it had been since discovered that he was a member of the gang. He then proceeded to describe Dan Billings. The description was so strikingly similar to Dan Douglas's physical characteristics that François was greatly disturbed. But the hotel keeper gave the officer positive assurance that he had seen just such a young man as he described killed in an affray at St. Mary's a short time before. He declared he had assisted some others in trying to identify him. The officer, fully convinced, took the hotel keeper's name and returned to St. Louis by the next boat.

It was not only the description of Dan Billings that disturbed François. It was also the preliminary statements of the officer: Dan Billings was supposed to have enlisted in Price's Army, either at Farmington or Pilot Knob, and then deserted. François vainly tried to get rid of the impression

the incident had made on his mind, and in spite of his sentimental generosity toward his rival he pondered over it. The more he tried to put it from him the more it forced itself upon his conscience until he decided to put an end to the affair by proving to himself its impossibility. He shrugged his shoulders and wondered what other tricks his insane jealousy would play on him. It was preposterous.

One day when he and Dan were hard at work over some mining problem, young Douglas paused in his task and ran his hand through his hair. It was a mannerism he acquired to remind bystanders of his wonderful adventures, a modest way of saying: "I can't help it if I'm a hero. I bear the stamp." The women were always deeply moved by the special gesture. This time it caught François's eye and he said laughingly:

"If I were you, Dan, I should refrain from going to Ste. Genevieve's for some time."

"Why, what's up?"

"Oh, nothing, only you look so much like a certain Dan Billings I heard about that you might be taken for him."

François was going on with his work. He purposely avoided looking at Dan, thinking himself

very mean for having broached the subject that scarcely gave him any rest.

Dan had made an effort to keep on with his figuring up the cost of building larger offices for the company. In adding a column of numbers and giving the total he blundered so terribly in the estimate that François glanced up. Dan was reading thousands for hundreds.

François watched him closely. There could be no mistaking his agitation. Dan discovered his error and rectified it. He hurried through the rest of the work and when he got through he made at once for his hat. François followed his example.

At the door, however, he paused and invited François by gesture to accompany him.

"Tell me about—Dan Billings," he stammered.

François told him all, watching closely all the while. When he finished Dan was deathly pale.

"And did he really believe what the hotel keeper said about the young man's death?" Dan fumbled in one pocket after another then he tapped his forehead, "I must have left my pipe on the desk, I'll go after it."

In the meantime François had answered:

"Oh! the officer believed old Landet and went back to St. Louis. I saw him board the train."

He turned and called:

"Shall I wait for you?" but Dan pretended he did not hear, so François went home alone.

When next they met, Dan had trimmed down his rather full mustache, and in a few weeks he looked quite different—he was wearing side-burns.

François worried more than ever. He had thought to put an end to his doubts, and instead, he was tormented by the conviction that Dan Douglas was, if nothing worse, a deserter. The fact that he was a deserter from the Confederate Army rendered him immune from prosecution by the Federal Government, but judging from Dan's uneasy attitude at all times, he seemed to have other cause for worry. As for François, the fact that he went on day after day loving Virginia hopelessly while she was engaged to a man who was renegade to the cause he had joined hands with, and a liar, besides, weighed heavily on his spirits. And yet there seemed nothing to do but wait and let the future unravel or tangle up hopelessly the skeins of several lives; the latter thought was intolerable to him. That Virginia should suffer through Dan's mistakes not to say crimes made the cross of life too heavy for François to bear. He tried to lighten his burden by avoiding Dan, but that affable individual, fully convinced that he had not betrayed himself, recovered his

normal poise and forced his company upon the Master of Bonne Terre. Likewise, it was impossible to avoid Virginia since she was a constant companion of Flora Birsch's at whose house he visited. Bonne Terre was not so large that one could lose himself in the crowd. After repeated conflicts with his feelings and conscience, François lulled himself to rest by conceding that as Dan Douglas was still young and perhaps not guilty of any gross crime, personally, he should be given a chance to retrieve himself. Moreover how could he dream of informing Virginia that he thought her lover a blackguard? Would she believe him? No; she would only misconstrue his motive.

So Dan Douglas was given the benefit of the doubt, and he took advantage of it and continued the hero of the place. Only, he no longer ran his fingers through his hair, and the scar, formerly very much in evidence, was carefully concealed. Quite often he would be pressed to recount to some visitor the narrative of his adventures, but with a nonchalant gesture he claimed to have quite forgotten them. His modesty became the universal theme.

CHAPTER XVII.

COMPLICATIONS.

It seemed to François that he was destined to be forever grubbing in some muddle. Scarcely had he settled down to tolerating the younger Douglas, when Mrs. Douglas, who was still living with the Birsches, took a violent liking for him, and all but dragged him into the disagreeable domestic tangle which existed between her and her husband. It was only after the exercise of much tact that he succeeded in retaining the friendship of the elder Douglas.

Along with this trial was another that pained François by subjecting him to public comment. During the past two years, various persons declared they saw, at intervals of a few days, a ghost, or apparition of some sort, within the walled enclosure of the grave by the chimney. What gave it more weight was the fact that those who claimed seeing the specter were newcomers in Bonne Terre. So the few old-timers said: "It's old Paul. He must have been guilty of some crime, after all."

The strange burial of François's parents had always reflected on him, and now when the ghost story came up, the superstitious suggested various possible reasons why the old backwoodsman should be disturbed in his grave and wish to wander about and "pester" quiet people. It might have been murder, some whispered. Others said: "Oh! it can't be that! but—who knows?" At any rate all "'lowed" there was a mystery back of it all, and the questioners' eyes were turned to the son. It was his fault, because old Paul had wanted to be forgotten, and he had made the grave conspicuous by placing a wall about it and leaving the chimney stand next to it like a monument.

After a time something happened which through a strange coincidence emphasized the ghost story and made it more serious and complicated to explain away. Since a year or two before the close of the war, Sam Hilderbrand had not been seen in Bonne Terre. He was said to have made good his escape to Canada. But one day, word came that he was killed in Madison County and was being brought to Bonne Terre for identification and burial. In due course the body arrived, and hundreds of people came in from all over the country to view the remains of the famous bushwhacker. Scores declared the corpse to be the

body of Sam Hilderbrand; others shook their heads knowingly and said it was not—it couldn't possibly be—since they had it from reliable sources that Sam was at the moment hunting and trapping in the vicinity of Hudson Bay. Silas Dade pronounced the dead man to be Sam Hilderbrand—how could he be mistaken? John Webb disagreed with Dade. He declared that the body could not be that of Hilderbrand. He was positive since he knew Sam Hilderbrand and had kept him many times when he was being hard pressed by pursuers. He didn't care who knew it now. Yes, he had sheltered the outlaw, and now he'd traveled twenty miles, over rough country, from Knob Lick, to see for himself if it was true Sam was dead. After a heated discussion between Webb and Dade, the majority of the people went home satisfied that the man who had terrorized several counties with his rifle "Kill Devil" was dead and put under ground for ever.

A fortnight after that excitement, Adolf Birsch startled Bonne Terre and the country for miles around by asserting that he met Sam Hilderbrand face to face, one night, near old Paul's grave. Birsch told his experience as any man would state a fact he discovered, simply to settle the question as to whether Sam was alive or dead, never dream-

ing of the turn it would take in some minds. "Then, of course Hilderbrand, is dead, and his ghost communes with Paul's" was circulated from mouth to ear all over the place. That was the missing link—beyond any doubt, Sam and Paul had at some time or other been partners in crime.

This version of the story daily added fuel to the flame, and throughout the hills people barred their doors at night and kept lights burning, lest Paul and Sam should appear. In the past, superstition had secured isolation for Paul's grave, during the night; but now, after the wide notoriety given it by the uncanny tale, most people could not have been induced to go past it after sundown.

There was whispered talk of tearing down the wall and ordering François out of the community. "He's a Yankee, anyway, what business has he to stay here?" Dade seized upon the fact that François was a Union man to dissuade the silly and ignorant people from making any foolish move. The old backwoodsman never wavered in his allegiance to his old friend's son, although he was not a little puzzled about the occurrence as told by Birsch.

Said he: "You've said it. François's a Yankee, but ye're forgitin' he haint an ord'nary one, he's

an officer,—captain,—an' no mistake. If you'ns want to bring the hull dalgarned Federal gov'ment down on our heads, just tinker with Jean François. Lor' bless my soul, that wouldn't be nairy greasy spot of me or you'ns left. If any of you'ns doubts, just come over to the store an' read in the paper what Ben Butler's been a-doin' in New Orleans."

That was a sufficient hint, so tar and feathers were never mentioned again for François, but the feeling remained in many a squeezed-up heart, and the Captain knew it from the cold shoulders turned to him, and the cut of people's eyes as he went about his work.

For a time prejudice became so strong against him that he contemplated leaving the country—he was absolutely discouraged. Dade would never hear of it, and Basil advised him to remain by all means. He told him that no man ever gained anything by running away. François overcame his fit of despondency and stayed on although his friends narrowed down to Silas and Bud, Mrs. Bardsdell, her mother and Virginia, and the Birsches—particularly Flora, oh! how she did fight for him! The Douglases were neutral. Adolf Birsch and Donald Douglas were thorough business men, not given to sentimentality. "Nice

fellow," they said "unfortunately, he's a Yankee."

François's last complication concerned Flora Birsch, a girl worthy to be any good man's wife, prettier in the opinion of many than Virginia Bardsdell whose beauty though of a more classic type lacked the vivacity of expression that Flora's possessed. The difficulty lay in the fact that François was conscious of the girl's love. He could not help it, she made it so evident in a hundred ways, but with no thought of letting him know what was in her heart, and without any forwardness, just the buoyancy of a happy spirit that does not think of denial as possible. Virginia was engaged to Dan, there was no other girl to interfere between herself and François, so Flora without giving a thought to it rushed on in her impetuous way. She managed to be a great deal in his company and Virginia who really liked the Captain, innocently—at first—helped her friend.

As for her relations with François, they were very cordial, in fact most pleasant. Not a week passed but that he called at the Bardsdell home. He even took an occasional walk with her. These occasional walks, however, were rare, and it was only when something very unusual kept Flora at home that François had the opportunity. Then

he had to reckon with Dan who took up a good portion of Virginia's time. Still, as it sometimes happened, whether by accident or not, François and Virginia were out together. They were red-letter days in the young man's calendar, in spite of the conversation which, after dealing with some book that interested them, invariably hinged on Dan. Never did he disturb by a look or a word her beautiful trust in the man she loved though it pained him very much to remain silent and listen to her eulogy of him. Her plans for helping him on in the future that seemed so bright for such a very young man, were discussed at length. But one day, there loomed up in their conversation a new topic for discussion. Virginia had discovered Flora's love for François,—how she had not perceived it sooner was a mystery to her,—at the same time she observed that François appeared to be ignorant of the blessings showered upon him, so she lost no time in informing him, as she thought, in a very adroit manner. That François should be in love with herself never entered her mind. The Captain, however, eluded all her efforts at "cornering him" but joined in singing Flora's praise, admitting that she possessed every quality of mind and heart a man could wish for. Virginia considered this reply as an honest man's

way of expressing his views for the moment, allowing for future possibilities, so quite satisfied she changed the trend of the conversation.

But François became much concerned over the state of affairs. He never could marry Flora Birsch, so he said to himself, and deep in his heart he was sorely troubled lest he should cause her to spoil her life. He tried in every way to lead her to recognize the fact that friendship was their only base of association, without in any manner betraying his love for Virginia. Flora was too bright a girl not to understand that she was considered merely as a friend, but that did not prevent her from indulging in the hope that François's feelings could be influenced some day and led into other channels; and that his ultimate conquest could be achieved, she never doubted.

Beset on every hand,—under suspicion on account of things he could neither help nor explain, loved almost to the point of distraction by a girl whose love was an open secret among her friends, and loving another girl better than he ever dreamed a man could love—an impossible love because she, in her turn, loved someone else—François wandered about seeking inspiration in his favorite haunts, the hills, until he came, by chance, upon his old friend Basil.

That wise man was not long in discovering that François was in trouble. He kindly, but cleverly, led the young man to confide in him.

After some reflection, Basil said:

"Go back to the valley, Jean, and—fight on. Keep on battling. What would you gain by going away? As for Dan Douglas, I see that you are not quite satisfied to sacrifice your love to a man of his type, but my son, it is not for his sake that you are giving up the woman you love, besides as you admit she does not love you, there is no sacrifice involved. Suppose Dan is not your ideal of a man, do you think for an instant that you would ever be quite happy even if he were? Your one chance lies not so much in his unworthiness as in your intrinsic worth, and if Virginia Bardsdell is ever to love you in place of another you must stand next to that other and give her an opportunity to discover who of her two admirers is the better man."

"But would that be fair when she is engaged, and she—?"

"I am not telling you to do anything. If Virginia loves Dan Douglas you must accept your fate bravely—as you are doing—and it is not for you to disillusion his sweetheart. But while there is life there is hope. Time may help your cause.

All I'd like you to do for yourself is not to give up. Set yourself against the wheel, watch your feet lest they become entangled in the cogs, and trust in God to guide you to some end where you may be adjudged a man fair and honorable in all things to your fellow-men. Besides your love, you have other work to accomplish. Remember that it lies with you to dispel the mystery that enshrouds your father's past."

François did go back, and throwing himself heart and soul in his work, he grew stronger day by day.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE ACCIDENT.

Upon reviving the mining company at the close of the war, a new furnace and plant had to be erected, also some effort made to extend operations. On account of the richness of several pockets, it was supposed the mines were capable of large developments. However, just in the beginning, the owners were somewhat dismayed to find that two of the five best pockets gave out suddenly, without leaving so much as a slender lead to another deposit. Two more shafts which waned in production sent miners off prospecting for more pockets.

The company than began to suspect it might be a serious question as to whether or not its holdings would be stable enough to warrant the investment of further capital, and installation of more efficient machinery.

The shaft nearest the mining plant gave promise of opening up a large body of ore, so all the company's energies were centered for several weeks

upon its exploitation, in order to test the situation before bringing down from St. Louis an expert mining engineer to report on behalf of a group of wealthy men who contemplated forming a new company to absorb the holdings of the development undertaking.

The uncertainty of ore veins had rather discouraged miners and thinned out the ranks of the more competent and experienced body. Therefore when it came to working out what was known as the Birsch shaft, there was a dearth of expert labor. The proving led into difficult rock. As no one understood blasting so well as François and Birsch, for two weeks they took their places in the shaft, among the workmen, and conducted the sinking of the shaft with success.

Instead of cutting offshoots or diverging tunnels, they lit the charges and were drawn up quickly by the windlass. This method was to be pursued until the hundred-foot level was reached, when the cross cuts would be made. Up to that time no trouble had been encountered, and, as a matter of fact, since most of the blasts were comparatively small, there was no occasion for anticipating the least danger of accidents. The most skillful man was François. He had performed

similar tasks in western mining and never made a mistake.

The men were hurrying work to complete sinking by a certain date, and it came to a Saturday afternoon, at two o'clock, with still several feet to be sunk. During François's absence from the mill for an hour, it was decided by Mr. Birsch, to try a larger charge than usual, so as to facilitate the clearing of the bed of tough stone. The first charge worked capitally, and the second encouraged the men to increase the charge further. The mistake was made, however, of trying three drill holes, or charges, at one time, in the eight foot bottom.

While the charges were being tamped in, several kegs of powder, more than were really required, were lowered in the tub, and placed to one side. Birsch or François always superintended the laying of the charges, and then sent the drillers up and had the tub put down before lighting the fuse.

On the triple blasts this was to have been the proceeding, but when all the men except Birsch had gone up, some one noticed François coming, and called to Birsch to be drawn up and let François set off the charges. Birsch came to the surface at once and waited for François.

On telling him about the three heavy bolts fixed

below for tearing out loads of rock, he reprimanded the men for taking the risk. He said, though, that he would light the fuses if the windlass hands would work fast once he jerked the signal rope.

François was lowered into the shaft, and those looking down saw three separate sparks light up as he applied the punk. At his signal, the men at the windlass turned the squeaking apparatus like madmen until he was safely landed. Then the timbers were laid across the yawning mouth, and everybody ran away. In a few minutes there were three distinct growls of deep rumbling in the shaft, so close together as to appear simultaneous, and the heavy logs over the opening kicked fiercely from the pelting of pieces of rock underneath.

The men gathered again about the shaft's mouth, jubilant over the success of the experiment, but François forbade them ever to try more than one shot at the time.

As soon as François felt assured that his advice would be heeded, he said he would go down in the tub to see whether or not it would be profitable to put in another shot before beginning to hoist.

The men turned the windlass backward until the tub rested on the bottom, François having tugged at the signal rope for them to stop. In another minute a loud explosion was heard, then

a cloud of smoke and dust puffed up from the crater! The men fell back astounded.

Birsch shouted out:

"Oh! the kegs of powder were left!"

He screamed down through the smoke, but no response came up. The men brought up the big shaft tub, but it had been reduced to splinters.

Wildly excited, they ran off for another tub, while some bystanders hurriedly brought water. Bud Dade took a short course to Dr. Keith's office. As he ran pass the Birsch home, he called out to Malinda the awful accident. The colored woman dropped the pail of water she'd been drawing from the well and she waddled and tumbled to the house screaming out for Obediah to run help "pore Mars' François."

The alarm soon spread all over the place. The explosion had been heard but it was thought to be a stronger charge than usual, used for blasting purposes. Women left everything and rushed to the mines.

By the time Dr. Keith got to the pit, nearly all the immediate inhabitants were gathered in a circle about the shaft and the awe-stricken workmen.

François's body had been brought up and lay on a detached door which had been hastily brought for the purpose.

Dr. Keith knelt beside the improvised stretcher to administer first aid. He lifted a limp arm and felt the pulse of the sufferer. Then he put his ear to the unfortunate man's heart and listened.

The people looked on with strained eyes, following his every motion. Finally—it seemed hours to Flora Birsch who stood pale and terrified a little back of the crowd—"He lives," he announced to the anxious watchers, "and—his face is not burned."

That seemed to be all he could say for the present. Flora leaned on the windlass against which she had propped herself, and with blanched face she closed her eyes and whispered: "Thank God!" Virginia who had just reached the scene of the accident rushed up to her friend crying: "Is he badly hurt?"

Flora could not speak. Virginia advanced through the crowd but just then the doctor called out:

"Stand back!"

He hurriedly bandaged the wounded man's torn legs and dressed an ugly wound on his breast. Then four men who stood by, waiting for instructions—Bud Dade one of the four—at a signal from Dr. Keith, picked up the stout batten door and carried the sufferer off in the direction of

Dade's Inn. The crowd made a move to follow, but the doctor halted it by saying that no one was needed.

He stopped a minute and appeared to reconsider. After running his eyes over the assembly he said:

"Yes, I'll probably require assistance—women's assistance. Miss Virginia Bardsdell and Miss Flora Birsch, would you be kind enough to come with me in case I need help?"

They answered by quickly taking their places behind the moving procession.

CHAPTER XIX.

A DISCOVERY.

SUCH careful attention did François receive from Dr. Keith, that two weeks after the accident he began to rally from the effects of the terrible injuries he sustained in the explosion. For more than one week, the able physician and surgeon battled unceasingly for the life of his patient. The Captain's wonderful recuperative powers seconded his efforts. Gradually the youthful vigor of the crushed man gained ascendency and he began to show signs of recovery. By the close of the fortnight he was able to speak a few words and take some notice of those about him—but, in a semi-dazed state. He appeared as one awakening from a nightmare, and his face, though unscarred, showed traces of the acute suffering that had racked his body, while yet unconscious. His surroundings puzzled him.

The bringing home of François cast more gloom over the Dade household. Mrs. Dade at first thought it was Bud who had met with an accident

and fainted dead away from the effects of the shock. Since the loss of her sons in the war, and the marrying-off of her daughters who had followed their husbands to distant settlements, all her affections had centered in Bud, who had always been her favorite besides. To imagine him carried in, broken and torn—in a dying condition—was too much for her bruised but fond heart. It was several days before she could be convinced that no harm had befallen her son and that it was François alone who was injured. For weeks she was confined to her bed and required constant attention.

The result of this was that Flora and Virginia volunteered to spend some time at the Inn and nurse François and Mrs. Dade. Others came and helped but returned to their homes. When the girls, a few hours after François's return to consciousness—Mrs. Dade was also much improved—ventured to hint to the doctor that their services might no longer be required, he begged them to remain. Being quite young for one of his profession, he assured them that he needed just such effective assistance as they could render; that in François's condition a relapse would be fatal. Flora and Virginia willingly consented, both out of unselfish motives—but the former added to her min-

istrations little undefinable touches that woman's love can inspire. That he might not lack the slightest care she was always at hand.

It was not long before François became strong enough to talk. A very few days after he had shown unmistakable signs of recovery, he was able to explain how the accident at the mines had happened—that is as far as he knew.

"When the tub reached the bottom," said he, "I stepped out, and saw that the three heavy blasts had played havoc with the floor and walls of the shaft. One huge block of stone from the east wall had dropped and stood across the center in a careening position. It was well up to my shoulder in height, and extended across more than half the width of the shaft. I went behind the block to push it on its side, lest it should fall on me and cause me trouble. I saw no smoke or fire, but I was scarcely behind the block when the deafening explosion occurred. I seem only to have a vague idea that the upheaval took place not quite under but a little beyond the large stone. That was all I noticed otherwise I should remember."

"Were you looking over the stone at the time?" asked Dr. Keith.

"No, I was stooping, trying to get momentum to push over the stone."

"That accounts for your face being untouched, but of course the shock was there just the same."

"Most likely that's why my face was not burned."

"But how do you explain the explosion and accident, Captain François?" again asked the doctor who wanted to know whether his patient had discovered the presence of the surplus powder left below—by oversight.

"I do not know, Doctor."

"When you descended to fire the three charges, did you not see several cans of powder?"

"No, I did not."

"Well, there were several extra kegs left after the charging of the holes, but it seems no one remembers how many."

"Then," said François thoughtfully, "they must have been off to one side, covered with stone dust. The blasts evidently covered them deep in débris, and undoubtedly lighted some surplus fuse, so that when I came down it had burned to the charge."

"Have you been unconscious all the time you lay so still we thought and feared—?" Flora could not finish the sentence.

"Yes; long before I quite realized that something had happened to me, I suffered fearfully as

if in a dream. It seems that unconscious though I must have been, I can look back and remember passing through some horrible experience. When I knew in the thousandth part of a second that an explosion had occurred, immediately I remembered no more, but throughout my illnes there lingered with me a feeling that a terrible noise was tearing every nerve in my body. At least this is the only way I can express it—though, to be sure, I have the impression of an awful chasm or gap. But as I've tried to make clear to you, it is bridged by subconscious recollection of the explosion."

"I am sure," said Flora, "that for the greater part of the ten days—"

"This is likely to lead to an unprofitable pseudo-psychological discussion," suggested Dr. Keith, inclined to use his professional authority to dissuade his patient from further mental exertion.

Virginia came to the rescue; but Flora frowned.

"It is fortunate, Captain, that your habit of seeing everything put right caused you to get behind that rock—or—"

She had not strayed far from the forbidden subject, for one second the Doctor looked impatient then,

"That's right!" he cried teasingly, "you've given me the clue. As Miss Virginia was saying, 'or

your face would have been badly burned' and disfigurement would have followed, then if ever you got into trouble again I would have an awful time getting you nurses!"

"Oh! Doctor!" cried Flora, "What are you driving at?"

The Doctor was smiling; he had succeeded in rousing Flora and interesting his patient, although judging from François's face he was quite confused. It was not due so much to the young doctor's words as the sly glance he gave the girls. Virginia did not seem to mind, but Flora was pink to her neck.

"Anyway," put in the doctor, "Captain François has no cause for complaint, first of all, it was, as Miss Virginia said, his habit of doing the right thing at the proper time that got him into the pit at the critical moment; secondly, he's had the two prettiest girls in the country for nurses—"

Virginia looked amused. She understood the drift of the clever physician's frivolous talk. The explosion was totally forgotten for the instant.

"Doctor!" cried Flora, "you're trying to make Captain François believe all you're saying without giving us a chance to put in a word. What about yourself? didn't you stay a whole week at the Inn? and what about Uncle Si and Bud Dade? didn't

they do most of the nursing? Virginia and I never had a chance to do anything on our own initiative; we never sat up a single night without you."

They were interrupted by a gentle tap on the door and Father Duncan came in. The confused nurses were glad of a chance to escape, and Doctor Keith was quite willing to leave his patient with the kind-hearted, earnest priest who during François's trying ordeal had called daily and even assisted in dressing his wounds. So they all adjourned to the front porch.

Catholicism was a new thing in the community, and the girls, Flora and Virginia in common with Silas, considered it something mysterious which they did not reconcile with the genial priest whom they liked in spite of his black robe—a constant reminder of his singular practices.

On leaving the sick man's room, Father Duncan paused a moment on the porch to chat with the doctor and the nurses. Virginia and Doctor Keith were conversing pleasantly but Flora was standing on the steps, her chin up in the air.

Still, it was not in the girl's nature to pout long, if at all, so the minute Father Duncan stopped, she seized the occasion to be agreeable and was at his side in a hurry:—

"Father Duncan, is it true Catholics shouldn't read novels?"

Father Duncan was surprised by the suddenness of the question but more yet by the look of defiance she cast at her companions.

"That depends," he replied quietly, "there are novels and novels. Certainly Catholics are expected to choose their reading but that does not necessarily exclude novels."

Virginia forgot to answer the doctor's last question. She was interested in what Flora was saying, and was glad her sunny disposition was overcoming her momentary sullennes. Dr. Keith had teased her friend mercilessly on leaving the room, in spite of Virginia's silent appeals. He had even hinted that her equal poise had a more soothing effect on the patient than Flora's exuberance of spirits with her unexpected spells of despondency, however short-lived. All that had been said maliciously.

"Well," said Flora addressing herself to the question implied in the priest's words; "as Captain François is a Catholic, and I thought I'd like to read to him so as not to cause him to talk unnecessarily, if there are any special books you can recommend, I'd like to take a suggestion from

you." The last words were spoken with unusual emphasis.

Flora continued to address herself to the priest but looked straight at Doctor Keith:

"I think when patients get to be convalescents, it is not always good for the doctor to be too attentive or they become afraid to stand on their feet. A little advice from another quarter at such a time is most desirable and—helpful."

"Let me see then," said Father Duncan, falling innocently in the trap, "there can be no objection to your reading, let us say—Scott?"

"That's it!" cried Virginia, "for we have a complete set of the Waverley novels!"

"I, also, have some novels among my books, and should your stock give out, you might come over and make your selection."

Father Duncan bowed gravely after those words and went slowly along the gravel walk. As he closed the gate Flora exclaimed:

"It must be terribly lonesome to be a priest, no wonder he sometimes looks so solemn."

"I don't think so," said Virginia, "he always impresses me as looking so comfortably happy."

"Yes, I suppose you are right. I was just thinking in a general way of their lives of abnegation and wondering—" then with a quick look in the

direction of Doctor Keith she cried: "I think he's a dear! He'll do first rate, and to say that I would never speak to him before—scarcely said good-day to him—although I liked him."

Then as the doctor seemed to ignore the conversation that was going on between the girls, Flora added mischievously:

"What elegant manners Father Duncan has! and how well read! if he hadn't offered us his books we would be at a loss to entertain Captain François while he is not allowed to raise his voice above a whisper!"

A few minutes later, the three friends—for Doctor Keith had grown quite fond of the girls—were chatting gaily in François's room. The doctor duly apologized to Flora and promised to "quit teasing." Then she very charmingly requested of him permission for her and Virginia to read by turns to the Captain.

This proved to be a source of great pleasure to François, and beginning with a few minutes a day it finally extended to many hours that helped him endure his enforced idleness. Father Duncan's library proved to be an invaluable treasure, so much so that Bud Dade began to take a lively interest in listening to the girls read and asked to be admitted into the circle.

It happened that during that time Dan Douglas was away on business and would only drop in occasionally.

Somehow, everyone in the town, the doctor included, acquiesced in turning the Captain over to the girls and Bud. Outsiders, however, felt better disposed towards him and for the time being they did not discuss him in connection with "Sam an' Paul". Most of them said:

"Haint he been havin' a time of it! But he can't complain of lack of care. Well, he haint our class nohow, so let Mr. Dan Douglas an' his sweetheart an' Miss Flora look after him, we'd only be in the way—though he haint more than us—he's been born right here in these hills."

The last words were added for the benefit of those who came down from St. Louis and might not be quite up on the genealogy of the "hill" families, just as if François had not been discussed long before the war, and his history made common property.

Along in the latter part of the third month of François's illness, when at last the doctor deemed it safe for him to get up and walk across the room —two ugly wounds in the chest that healed but slowly had retarded his convalescence—Flora experienced an awakening that changed her whole

life. It came gradually about and in an unexpected way, fraught with trials, and necessitated a reconstruction of ideals—not possible earlier in her existence.

In the serene peacefulness of the village, there was no society or amusements of any kind—no places to visit, no one to receive, so that when Captain's accident and subsequent helplessness drew Flora and Virginia to his aid, they could quite easily give up their time to entertaining and comforting the afflicted man. There was no one to object, and there was no reason to hesitate as Bud and Dan—the latter only occasionally, it is true—formed part of the coterie. But in the sisterly sharing of the pleasures, Virginia wished Flora to enjoy the greater part and watched with interest for any indication that the Master of Bonne Terre might give of his love for Flora, whose charming sprightliness and mischievous, fun-making inclinations made her a most cheerful body to enliven a man just picking his way back to health.

However, Virginia used the greatest caution in endeavoring to render service to her friend. In no way did she let Flora suspect she was aware of her love for the Captain. No one who was not on the lookout for such subtle efforts on the part of Vir-

ginia would have suspected her. Even Captain François, while uncomfortably conscious of Flora's yearning for him, never thought Virginia was going beyond the interest she had once expressed to him.

In his enforced confinement and emaciated physical condition, Captain François found it difficult to control his feelings towards Virginia. It was much easier when he could go about his work, or dash into the battle line, but now when all buoyant strength had left him, when no mining problems occupied his mind and all occupation was denied him, to depend day after day, pale and helpless, on the illimitable kindness of two beautiful and lovely women, one of whom loved him and the other whom he loved, the unfortunate man owned himself nonplussed by fate.

To old Basil he again unbosomed himself. The hermit had heard of the terrible accident, and came to see "Capitaine François." But the only comfort Jean got was: "Be patient, my son, time will put all things right."

Often he would have run away from the charming solicitude that permeated the atmosphere of his room, had it been possible; and again there was about it that hypnotic influence, not unlike that drawing magnetism that charms the tiger's

prey, ever inducing him to look on, hoping and praying for a hand to lead him away but with Virginia following close by. This strange and illogical mental exercise went on continually while his heart became more insistent each day.

An unexpected turn in affairs took place.

The blindness of love may obliterate everything from a man's mind except the image of the woman he loves, but the intuition of a woman will at some time or other take in the situation as it stands, especially when it has to do with her interests.

Flora admitted to herself that Virginia's ministrations to François were welcomed by him in the exact measure that hers were, and having once realized that much, she somehow found herself watching out for some subtle distinction that might mark their acceptance,—for instance, the fact that she was engaged to someone should make itself felt, however little. There was as yet no hint of jealousy underlying Flora's motive in watching, it was simply a thought that had occurred to her. Wouldn't it be the most natural thing in the world for François to lean just a trifle more on the girl whose affections were disengaged as she supposed he must believe? It was a most

interesting and fascinating study, so Flora's mind became fixed on the issue.

When at last the undreamed-of revelation flashed upon the impetuous young girl, the mixed resentment and jealousy of a normal woman swept over her and nearly maddened her. When the realization came Flora and Virginia had been obeying the doctor's orders by giving the convalescent man his first outing on the nearest hillside.

This was a walk of less than fifty yards to a rock ledge just above the spring. The buds of the hickory were just opening into big creamy lobes, and the mayapple and red percoon were in full bloom out of beds of dry oak leaves. The exhilaration of the changed and weakened man and his companions carried them back to the exuberance of childhood. After François was made to feel comfortable on a sheepskin carefully spread over a bench of stone, Flora made a specialty of gathering wild snowdrops and showering them at his feet. Virginia contrasted the purity of the snowdrops by heaping hatfuls of violets before the shower of tiny white flowers. Calling to Flora to wait a while she rushed off for another supply. Suddenly, as Virginia came up the steep incline, her cheeks prettily flushed from the exertion of stooping to pick the beautiful purple drops, Flora

detected in François's eyes a light and a look of yearning, that she would have given worlds to call forth, and at the same time her heart seemed to shrink and leave a void in its place. She sat on a fallen tree near by and watched the silent thoughts of the man reveal themselves. Virginia had sat at his feet and was weaving a chain with the tender blossoms.

A sickening pain now gripped Flora's heart and she became dizzy. She was seized by the impulse to hide her pain so she walked rapidly away down to the little brook, and there wrestled with her feelings. Virginia had missed her and was calling loudly to her friend. Flora came back half way and said she was going home a while as she was not feeling well and for them not to worry. She would send Bud to help get the Captain back. Virginia looked anxious and pleaded with Flora to take her home. She had run up to her and was endeavoring to know what was the matter. Flora just shook her head and showed symptoms of annoyance at Virginia's insistence, so the latter slowly turned back and tried to finish her work. There was a long silence—neither Virginia nor the captain had seen Flora act so strangely before—and they could not but wonder as they watched

Without waiting for Bud, Virginia and François soon afterwards returned to the Inn. The sun was shining brightly, but they were conscious of feeling that a cloud was casting its shadow over their outing.

As soon as Virginia got the Captain safely at his home, she hurried over to Flora's to ease her fears that some fearful illness had stricken her dear friend. Mrs. Birsch said that her daughter complained of a severe headache.

"Yes," Mrs. Birsch admitted, "she appeared upset, but I suppose it's the effect of spring weather. Formerly I always gave her medicine at this time of the year but now she won't hear of it."

"May I see her?"

"She made me promise not to disturb her under any circumstances. She said she would sleep it off."

At this point Malinda shambled in:

"Missus Birsch, ah'ze don't like Miss Flora's eyes. Ah'ze stopped her and begged her take a cup o' tea, an' sho' ma'am, she never answered me. 'Peahs to me she can't hear good. She jist star'd me like one 'o 'em somnamboolists you'ze heerd 'bout, an' whin ah runs arter her with the cup in my han' she jist slams the doo' in my face, like

that!" and Malinda made a dash at Virginia to illustrate her point.

"Don't get worried, Malinda, it's simply a headache and it will wear off before long." Mrs. Birsch's finality of tone indicated dismissal to the old cook.

That was all Virginia could learn, so failing to get more satisfactory replies to her anxious questions, she went back to her home, disturbed and puzzled over Flora's inexplicable conduct.

Meanwhile Flora was trying to regain her bearings. She began by reviewing her past, and was surprised to see how uneventful it had been, personally. She had taken, it is true, an active part in all the doings of the place since she had set foot in Bonne Terre, but nothing that happened had concerned her more than the other inhabitants of the little town. There was only one interest in her life and it centered in François. Her father and mother were sedate, verging on sternness, and had hedged her in with their careful kindness until she reached young womanhood. Then she had beheld a splendid young giant, and, without restraint, had continued in her admiration until her girlish fancy ripened into an all-consuming love which alas! excluded all suspicion that love, to be crystalized and perfected, must meet an equal response and merge with equal

ardor. When she realized that this was denied her she tottered and groped for support.

After a sleepless night, reason reasserted itself, and the woman's instinct warned her that she must use the utmost tact in concealing her disappointment. Accordingly, she arose early, dressed with her usual care, and ran over to her friend's home for a little chat before breakfast. She was not sure of her feelings towards Virginia, but did not stop to analyze them. With the instinct of one who has missed her foothold and slipped, she was ready to look about for the effect on others and quickly get back on her feet.

The friendship between the girls had been too real and unselfish until then to be easily disturbed, and its nature was such that it would snap rather than submit to adulteration.

Virginia peered inquiringly into her friend's eyes. Flora could not read treachery in that frankly innocent gaze and a hint of remorse smote her heart; still, how could she confide in her? Virginia, noted the pale face and slightly red eyes, and tremulous mouth. She was not convinced that a mere headache could be responsible for them, besides, Flora had always enjoyed perfect health; but in the absence of any knowledge or even hint of what warred in Flora's bosom, she was compelled to accept the explanation given.

CHAPTER XX.

A SACRIFICE.

It was difficult for Flora to face disappointment and its consequent humiliation. In her home, mother and father gave in to her wishes—to say nothing of Malinda and Obediah—and although she never abused her power over anyone, the fact that everything and everybody was at her beck and call had the harmful effect of making her unwilling to submit to failure of any kind. As a matter of fact, never before had she been thwarted, and it seemed rather hard that her first experience should be of a nature most painful to endure. On the other hand, her generosity and kind-heartedness went a long way toward helping her in such an extremity.

For several days she remained closely in her room, trying to arrive at some decision that would enable her to bear the ache of heart and gloom caused by her discovery. At last she made up her mind. Virginia was innocent, that much she knew from the first. Moreover, she was engaged to

Dan Douglas, and consequently had no designs upon Captain François. Virginia could not even be cognizant of the love so silently bestowed upon her. And,—there was a grain of comfort in the thought,—Captain François loved Virginia just as hopelessly as she loved the captain. Here was a chance for the unselfishness of her nature to assert itself. For a long time she pondered upon the strange complications we are called upon to endure or straighten out in life. Dan Douglas, in Flora's opinion, treated Virginia shamefully not to say with inconsiderate neglect, he wasn't fit to associate with Virginia. Not being blinded through love, the glamor that surrounded Dan for a while after his return from the army had worn off long ago. Why, she reflected, should one so noble and true as Virginia, be wasted on an unappreciative man? Having reached this point in her cogitations, the impulsive Flora rushed forward, utterly forgetful of self in the warmth of championing the cause of another. Love and friendship merged in the act, and for their sakes,Flora determined she would aid François in winning her chum Virginia unto himself. In the exhilaration of renunciation, she decided to sacrifice her life, if necessary, to make him happy.

In this decision there was no malice against Dan

Douglas, no special summing up of his faults and deficiencies and weighing them against François's qualities. He stood out in Flora's mind just what she felt him to be, a coolly calculating, unscrupulous young man, intensely selfish, without any redeeming virtue,—his good looks only counted against him, made him dangerous. However, it was as a minor character that he stood in the girl's scheme, so with the following reasoning he was dismissed from her mind: "What can it matter to him, since he does not care for Virginia as he should?" The one thing to accomplish was to bring her friend to recognize the sterling qualities of François and prove to her that she was wasting herself on an unworthy man instead of returning the pure, devoted love of one who was willing to sacrifice his own happiness to insure hers.

Flora wept what she thought would be her last bitter tear after baring her heart to God, then she consecrated her purpose, and prayed for strength to surrender all for the sake of the man she loved and for—her friend. With the glow of sacrifice in her heart, there came, also, quiet solace which made her doubly strong. She set about her purpose without delay.

That same hour she bounded into Virginia's

room, and throwing her arms about the loving girl who was now dearer to her than ever, said:

"Virginia, I'm entirely recovered now, and I couldn't stay away from you any longer."

"I'm truly glad you've come. How you did frighten me, I thought you might be very ill and that your mother did not realize it. Malinda, also, poor woman, was terrified, she said you acted so strangely."

"Virginia, I did suffer more than I can tell you. However, as it is all over, pray do not let us speak of it again." After a slight hesitation, she added: "And how is Captain François?"

"Oh, dear, he's very slow about getting well, I don't quite understand it, although we all know he's had a fearful shaking up."

"Shall we go to him this afternoon, and gather flowers again?" Flora looked straight ahead and spoke bravely, "He did seem to enjoy our children's play so much that day."

"Yes, but after you left, he seemed to lose interest in it. We went home almost immediately."

"Then we shall go to him. He will be glad to see—us—I've no doubt, he's waiting now."

"I do not think so, for he was quite concerned about your illness. He fears you are taking fever."

"Obediah'll go over at once and tell him I'm well. And, shall I add that he may expect you and me at three o'clock this afternoon?"

"Yes."

Flora saw at that very moment the old colored man passing the gate, so he was given the message and was soon trudging down the road towards the Inn.

"Now, Virginia," said Flora returning from the door, "tell me how you've been since I was here last. There must be something that's happened. Perhaps, some new idea has come into your mind. Remember, I've not seen you for several days. As I look back now, it seems an age."

"What makes you ask me such a question? Is there anything about me to suggest it?" Then after a short pause and a slight trembling of the lips, she continued: "You don't know how I missed you! Twice I stopped at your house, but Mrs. Birsch told me you were resting."

Flora put her arms about her friend once more, and Virginia made room for her on the little settee where she was seated.

"I've been wishing to see you, Flora, because I want to confide in you, and I'm so glad you're giving me the chance to do so. Mamma and Grandma have just gone for a drive over to the

old farm, and we are quite alone—except old Jennie, but bless her dear old soul, we could tell her our dearest secrets and she'd have a hand cut off before she'd tell a single one."

"It's just so with Malinda, ever since I was that high she's known all I do, and what I think, or don't tell her, she guesses without ever making a mistake. I'm sure Jennie is as faithful as can be, or she wouldn't be Malinda's sister."

"All right," said Virginia putting on a kiss-me-quick bonnet, "then let's go out-of-doors."

"The rustic seat by the rose bushes is the very thing. We can sit there and talk, and I defy even Jennie and Malinda to hear what we say." Flora's cheeks were aglow with suppressed excitement.

The girls paused as they set foot on the lawn and inhaled deeply the aroma of the clover from a neighboring field, their heart-beats keeping time with the notes of a thrush that sat perched on the highest limb of one of the three tall poplars by the side of the house. Other spring birds sang in the squatting cedar trees. The tender blue grass made a soft carpet under their feet as they tripped along,—Virginia intent on her thoughts and Flora curiously watching her friend. Watch, the old house dog, got up lazily from where he

was sunning himself, and trotted behind his young mistress. He was disappointed when she sat down by Flora, for he had expected to go for a walk; still, he was not quite sure but that this was a clever ruse so he stretched at full length, at her feet, with half his body on part of her white skirt that trailed on the ground, and closed his eyes.

"Now, Virginia," Flora began while a sense of protection made her put an arm around Virginia's waist, "Tell me everything. One must have someone to talk things over with, and that's what friends are for. We've been that since we've known each other and I think we shall always be. Don't you really believe it?"

"No one could shake the confidence I have in you, Flora. Well, this is what I want to say: as you know, Dan and I have been engaged a long time, and of late, as you may have noticed, he's been away a great deal, so much so, Flora, that—and I'm so ashamed of myself for it now—I was just a bit uneasy and anxious, but I suppose it's because I'm so fond of him, don't you think that's the reason?"

Before Flora could frame a reply, Virginia continued:

"You'll see for yourself when I tell you oh, how foolish I've been to worry! While you were ill,

Dan came over to see me. Think of it, he came down on purpose from St. Louis, and he was ever so much more affectionate than he'd been in a long time. You do not know how he loves me. He says that his apparent neglect is all due to business; that since Captain François's accident he had so much more to attend to. He has wonderful plans which he means to carry out and he is sure to succeed,—if you had heard him you would be as convinced as I am, for he told me all about them. You must know through your father that the mines have not done well lately—practically all the pockets are played and most of the miners have gone away. Yes, recently," she added as Flora's eye-brows were raised in surprise, "and even the fine shaft Captain François was hurt in, has proven a failure. Now this is the interesting part: Dan says that a clever mining expert from St. Louis has stated to him in a letter that rich lead ore in permanent veins, or beds, exists deeper down—it may be very deep—and Dan has determined to interest capital in undertaking a larger development. He feels certain it will turn out a great mine." Virginia had been speaking rapidly, but pausing at times to watch the effect of her words on Flora. She started again, coloring somewhat:

"So much for business. Then he said," she stopped and caught up a stray curl and put it back in place; she no longer looked at Flora; "that when he returns from New York—that's where he's going to get the money—" she smoothed the folds of her skirt, "he and I shall be married."

Flora did not speak a word. A look of triumphant joy flashed in her eyes and she thought: "Why meddle at all? When Virginia is married then—" She bit her lips and to hide her emotion leaned over and pulled Watch's ears.

Virginia, disturbed by her friend's movements, could not help but notice her heightened color.

"How well you look, Flora!" then in the joy of her happiness she cried: "And I should like Captain François to see you this minute. Why, you just look radiant! The other day when you were taken ill he was saying such lovely things about your complexion."

Then after a second's thought she added:

"Oh! Flora, how I do love you! To think that it's the news I've given you that has cast this glow over you. Mamma was saying the other day we are more like twin sisters than—"

Flora was now sitting bolt upright and looked pale.

Virginia was most anxious.

"I never saw such a change come over one. Do you think it can have anything to do with your recent headaches?" she asked.

"Don't worry, Virgie, I just had a little spell—yes, of my recent trouble—but I assure you it's over. I am quite well again and ready to listen to you. When you finish I have something to talk over with you."

"At the beginning of Dan's conversation, Flora, I was inclined to persuade him to take me to New York with him, to get married just before he left here; and he must have guessed my thoughts. For, of his own self, he made me see the wisdom of waiting until he comes back—I was so glad I hadn't spoken.—By that time he's sure the company will have all the money it needs to complete the work. He's right. However, he made up for the disappointment it caused me by planning with me little things we wish to do—when we're married; some changes in the house,—we've decided to live here,—and a lot of other things. You see we could never discuss them before because we never decided when we would be married. It may seem strange, but I suppose that's the way with most people. As he said when I remarked it,—'What's the use of crossing a bridge before you come to it.' This was my first chance to

make him understand what I expect of my husband and he listened to all my prattle, smiling occasionally. Do you know that I'd sometimes thought he didn't care, that he would never be interested, for instance, in the way I do up my hair, in the number of ruffles on my latest dress, in the pattern of the carpet? Well, I was mistaken, he is interested, but as he says, few men give their opinion on such subjects, but that if I wish him to do so, he will be most pains-taking in pleasing me. You see what I get for waiting?"

"I never knew before that Dan—" but Flora stopped short not deeming it wise to criticise, and also struggling with opposing sentiments.

"He never did until yesterday, and I don't mind telling you now, but he used to laugh at what he called my notions, and I had never done more than hint at them for fear of ridicule. Now, it's so different with Captain François, did you ever hear anyone say more agreeable things when we wear a pretty frock? He doesn't know the name of the material nor a thing about the making-up, but the general effect is sure to please him and it always makes one feel satisfied to receive some sort of acknowledgement from a man of good taste. He always says the right thing at the right time." Virginia stopped and blushed. She

arose and freed her skirt from Watch's paws that were entangled in the folds.

Flora made a desperate effort at self-control and said:

"Virginia, I must speak with you, and you must pardon me if I seem rude or indiscreet. It was very sweet of you to talk to me as you have done, and it somehow gives me the right to relieve my mind of a great load. First of all, do you feel sure, that I am your friend?"

Virginia's brief reply, "Why, Flora!" carried conviction.

"Then, may I ask you a question?"

"Anything you like."

"Did Dan's last visit do away with every single doubt of him that you could not otherwise but entertain during this last year, to say nothing of the others before? Are you in the very depths of your heart convinced that a man can change his disposition so suddenly?"

"What do you mean?"

"Virginia, do you think you are entirely satisfied? When you spoke of your ideal husband and he spoke of the uselessness of 'crossing a bridge' did that leave no sting in your heart? It is very little, it is true, but it shows after all what is in the man's mind. He would do any-

thing to get you when the time came but after, would he cross and recross the bridge to please you? Think well."

Virginia repeated, but very feebly:

"What do you mean, Flora?"

"Darling, have you never cried over Dan Douglas and—his strange courtship?"

"Oh, Flora! how can you? How could you know it?" Virginia covered her face with her hands, "I've wept myself to sleep many a night—" then her face brightened, "but don't you understand why I'm so happy now? It's for that very reason, because I see happiness ahead of me when I had feared disappointment."

"I understand, but, dear, does Dan love you as he should?"

"I think you are going too far, Flora—" tears welled up in Virginia's eyes, "but I don't mind telling you he does."

"You see, Flora," she continued after a while, "I know you mean well, but when you speak of those other years, you do not realize that I was not more than a schoolgirl, in fact, I was engaged to Dan before I went to Richmond."

The pleading voice in Flora's heart was stilled once more in her self-renunciation, and she answered:

"I know the whole history of your engagement. You know the good people of Bonne Terre could not possibly remain silent about it, so long before I met you I knew all about Virginia Bardsdell, then when your mother came she spoke of it once or twice. But, I want you to be convinced that it is my earnest wish for your happiness and all it means that makes me speak as I'm doing—"

"I'm afraid you never liked Dan, what makes you be prejudiced against him?"

"If I'm prejudiced it is simply because I want you to be happy and I have the feeling that he is not what he should be."

Virginia made a movement to rise. Flora held on to her hand.

"I thought we were going to discuss the situation freely," and she drew her gently down beside her. "If you will listen to me now I shall give you an opportunity to raise Dan in my estimation. Be patient."

A look of resignation stole over Virginia's face. She said:

"I admitted to you, and it was very unwise in me to do so, if not even unfair to Dan, that, in the past, I sometimes suspected he did not love me as I love him. But Flora, my love for him is so great that should there be a slight difference in

the degrees of our affections it may be a matter of temperament,—a thing he cannot possibly control, therefore, why should I not be willing to accept him as he is? Some day, he shall learn the extent of my love and then—"

"But what if he never realizes it? I am no older than you, Virginia and don't pretend to be wiser, but I assure you I'd be afraid to marry a man who did not love me to my satisfaction, or as perfectly as I loved him. You may win him and I may be wrong, but I'm not convinced and I feel that you are not—convinced. You are groping about, trying to get hold of something which you are not quite sure even exists."

"All I have to say, is that I love him."

"It is for that very reason you must be certain, before-hand, of his love, otherwise you'll be miserable all the rest of your life. And, have you never thought that you might wrong him? If you marry him on your own love and he does not love you he is wronged."

"But why would he ask me to marry him unless he loved?"

"A mistaken sense of chivalry. It does not always require a man of high ideals or honor to imagine he's got to do a thing because people expect it of him."

"Flora, if I did not have such perfect confidence in the purity of your motives, I would not listen to you a minute. But as you seem to be so utterly under a false impression—" All at once, Virginia broke down and her tears fell fast. Flora took her in her arms and suggested a walk, but Virginia clung to her and between sobs cried out:

"I know you are partly right, that is why I'm crying. I had not considered it precisely in that form, but I was—sometimes afraid he might love someone else. Only yesterday, I got new hope."

Flora relented:

"It may be that I am wrong and that your hope may be realized. Do you know what makes me think Dan Douglas is not worthy of you? Well, first of all because he does not appear to appreciate you at your full value. He's a ninny!" she cried exasperated.

Then as the tears fell faster:

"I won't say another word, Virgie, if you make me a promise. I vow I'll hold my tongue hereafter."

"What is it?"

"I'd like you to promise me you will wait until you are sure Dan Douglas loves you as you love him before you commit your future irretrievably into his keeping."

Virginia sat looking far away as if living her future in the brief space of a minute. Her bonnet had fallen to the ground and neither girls had noticed that Watch's head rested on it. With a start, she made a motion to put it back in place thinking it had slipped to the back of her head when she discovered it was missing. Flora picked it up, and Watch, disturbed in his slumber, raised his ears in protest; then he made himself comfortable once more on his mistress's skirt.

Flora was giving up all hope of getting a reply when the answer came:

"I shall, Flora, your request is reasonable. I promise you to wait until I'm certain."

The girls kissed. A short, rather awkward pause followed.

"Now, Virgie, I'll run home to Mamma. I see Malinda signalling for me to come. If you'll stop for me after luncheon, we'll then go to the Captain."

Virginia answered listlessly:

"I'll be there on time."

Slowly she arose and accompanied her friend as far as the gate. For a long time after Flora was gone, she stood leaning on the white post, dangling her bonnet by the strings. Finally, after returning a farewell wave she retraced her

steps to the rustic seat. Watch who followed, took up his position this time with his bushy head resting on her knees. For several minutes the faithful animal remained perfectly still, seemingly aware that Virginia was not conscious of his presence. Then when silent tears fell hot on his mistress's cheeks and trickled down to his nose he whined piteously until she stroked his velvety ears.

"You dear old Watch!" she whispered, folding her plump white arms about his neck and drawing him to her until she rested her cheek on his head, "you know all about my trouble, don't you. If only I could be sure somebody would love me as faithfully as you. You are better than Flora, Mamma, or even him, for they don't understand and you do. Doggie, you know my way of loving, and you know and I know Flora is not altogether wrong, for I must have in return the same sort of love I give to be my own natural self. How did she guess my secret, did you tell her? No, I know you didn't or you wouldn't be my faithful Watch. Did Jennie tell? She came into my room one night when I was crying. No, no, Watchie, she didn't tell on her 'honey chile' she 'sho didn't.' Nobody knows what your poor mistress is suffering, not because I promised, but

because it was right for me to promise. Do you think everything will come right? Do you? Well, then help keep my love tender and true—for him."

A deep consoling bark from Watch was equivalent to saying he understood.

CHAPTER XXI.

A VOICE IN THE WOODS.

THAT afternoon, Captain François impatiently awaited the arrival of his friends, Virginia and Flora, for there was in the air a balmy sweetness, refreshing and exhilarating, which buoyed up the convalescent man and made him eager to roam through the forest, along paths bordered with wild flowers, with chirruping, nestling birds fluttering overhead. Long before the hour set in Obediah's message, he left the Inn and managed to walk unassisted a little way, to a large tree stump on the roadside, where he sat that he might meet the girls all the sooner. Anticipation of the outing's pleasure made the minutes drag. It seemed as though Flora and Virginia would never come; he wondered what could possibly delay them, then glancing at his watch he realized that his anxiety made him unreasonable and from his perch on the stump he took in the details of life in the field across the way.

Silas and Bud were busy ploughing. He could

hear their gees and haws to the horses, and watch the fresh furrows of soil they turned up to the sun. Flocks of blackbirds strutted behind the ploughmen to catch the fat grubworms. A little colt followed its mother about, she, being compelled to work in one of the teams, and now and then it chased one of the several hounds halfway over the field.

From his position at the highest point of the road, François could also see Mrs. Dade's garden. A stooped figure,—Si's faithful helpmeet had lost forever her strength and vigor—was occupied therein transplanting pinks and other spring perennials. While he observed her careful and painfully slow movements, an old hen and her young brood came through the open gate, and quickly began scratching in the pea bed which was easily distinguishable with its array of dried branches meant as supports for the tender vines. Immediately the feeble old lady ran tottering along the walk uttering shrill cries of "Shoo, shoo—oo—oo" threatening the while Madam Hen with her blue checked apron. There was a loud clucking and piping sounds from the tiny chicks, and mother and her babies retreated indignantly, as Mrs. Dade slammed the gate after them, coming very near catching the stragglers.

This panorama of life in spring occupied but a few minutes of François's time, when pleased and affected by the domestic simplicity and serenity of it all, he turned again to look in the direction of Borgy Hill for the first glimpse of his girl friends. Once more he consulted his watch. There was yet a little time. "How childish of me!" he cried half laughingly, "when I know they will come at the proper time!" But he kept his eyes on the path at the base of the hill which he knew they must turn to come to him.

"At last!" and François slipped off the stump and stood leaning on the stout hickory stick which had helped him up the road, watching Flora and Virginia as they drew nearer and nearer. Signs of the new season were also apparent in their attire. Winter cloth dresses had been discarded for light white ones and in their belts were slipped bunches of long-stemmed jonquils; also, fascinators and hoods had given place to pretty lawn bonnets.

François observed them as they walked arm in arm, talking most confidentially, and he wondered what they could be saying. He could tell by the way they paused and looked at each other that something of more than passing interest was under discussion, but their voices when they did

reach him sounded scarcely over an audible buzz. Just before the girls came upon him, a dozen yards or so away, he knew that they sighted him for they drew their heads closer together and seemed to whisper, with an occasional glance in his direction betraying that he was the subject of some comment.

In fact, this is what they were saying:

"Virginia, have you noticed that since Captain's illness he seems to be more particular about his appearance?"

"Yes, and I think his pallor is even quite becoming. It gives him a look of distinction which sets him apart from the men hereabout."

"I think he looks so handsome without his beard. Hello, Virgie, would you believe he's come out to meet us! I told you he would enjoy another outing. See him standing by that stump."

Virginia laughed merrily:

"Where do you suppose my eyes are? I've seen him for the last five minutes. Yes, Flora, I think he is better looking without a beard, but I've seen him look like this before. I met him in Richmond, and it made such a change in his appearance that it took me quite a while before I could remember where I'd see him? I like Cap-

tain François's face very much. I think he has such expressive black eyes, but they are rather severe."

"Virgie, I don't think so, and you wouldn't if—you'd seen him look—as I've" Flora was red and pale by turns.

Virginia stopped short in her walk and pulling Flora around looked straight in her eyes:

"Flora," she cried, "I'm glad to hear you say that. Captain François is a most estimable gentleman, and Flora, dear," she whispered, "I hope that some day when he asks you to become his wife—"

"Oh!" quickly put in Flora leaning heavily on Virginia, "don't think of such a thing. I never have!" she answered biting her lips and turning crimson. "When I spoke of his appearance I had reference to his dress more than his physical—appearance—I met Bud one day with a large package which he said contained some suits Captain François had ordered from St. Louis." All the while Flora was endeavoring to extricate her hands from Virginia's grasp. She finally succeeded and walked a few steps ahead of her innocent tormentress. Virginia was thinking.

"I shall not mention him to you again in that way," she said as she caught up with Flora and

gently drew her arm through hers. Nevertheless, she smiled knowingly as she played with the flowers at her belt.

"Please, Virgie, hush or he'll hear us!" pleaded Flora.

"And here you are!" François called out a few seconds later. "I've been here quite a long time, in the hope that you might have come a little sooner, but you are the most exact and precise bodies I've ever known."

"Why, Captain, if we'd guessed that you felt so lonely we would have come sooner, why didn't you send word by Obediah?"

"Now, now! you make me feel quite guilty, Miss Flora. No one is more conscious of your kind heart than I. It is very good of you and Miss Virginia to give up so much of time to an idler such as I've been now for months, but I am consumed by restlessness. See, over yonder, Uncle Si and Bud at work. Even Mrs. Dade has been able to overcome her weakness and labors among her flowers and chickens. How can I thank you enough for your constant companionship?"

"Please don't go on that way about it," and Flora looked down confused, "it was silly of me to feel badly and spoil your outing the other day."

"Here I am again at fault, you must think me very cold-hearted indeed not to have inquired about your health. Miss Virginia can tell you how anxious we were about you, but this morning Obediah quite reassured me on the score. By the way, just when I saw his white, kinky head bob from around the cedars as I sat on the porch this morning I'd been contemplating having Bud help me down to the village in search of my two nurses."

"Then why didn't you?" asked Flora who had recovered some of her pertness.

"Are you really feeling so much stronger that you could stand the walk, we might go there instead of going to the forest."

"No thank you, Dr. Keith can take me there any day in his buggy, but as for my feeling stronger, I know I'm much improved, only I prefer to follow Uncle Si's advice and not overtax myself for a while yet. I am so anxious to get back to work."

"Where shall we go this afternoon?" asked Flora.

"I've thought it all out while waiting," said François; "there's a delightful trail up through this glen which is seldom frequented. A few paces puts us into the solitudes of a primeval wood and yet, the farthest point is not farther than half

a mile from here. If we walk slowly—Doctor Keith has impressed upon me the necessity for not straining my strength—I know I can get there safely."

"I'm sure I know the spot," cried Flora, "I mean I've heard about it." Turning to Virginia she continued: "I heard Mother tell Mrs. Bardsdell she knew of a short route to the Inn, and she took her through it one day that they both went to see Mrs. Dade. When I asked her about it she said it was scarcely safe in these times to pass through it alone or even with Virginia."

"I'm sure she can have no objection to our accompanying Captain François there," put in Virginia in the awkward pause that followed Flora's remark.

"Of course not, Virgie, Mamma would think it quite safe, especially at this hour. She was probably afraid we might venture there when we return home after dusk, as we sometimes do in winter."

"Well, the reason I wanted to take you there, listen! I said *take you,* heretofore you've been leading me and it is time I should assert my returning strength and importance as a man!" He laughed good-naturedly. "The reason I want you to see the place is because of the many dogwood trees which must now be in full bloom. You have

no idea how they transform the narrow valley into a fairylike glen."

Chatting merrily, the three disappeared through the nearby scrub post-oak bush, and Mrs. Dade, paused in her gardening to listen to familiar laughing voices which seemed quite near although she could see no one. They soon died away in the distance towards the dense woods.

The way, indeed, was most exhilarating and calculated to stir new life in a man who had been ill. At times it led across soft, green sward beneath great spreading oaks, then again it threaded zigzag, a narrow trail to widen suddenly into a broad path over the slightly ascending flat between the high hills. Massive trees stretched out their branches to shut out the sun, morning, noon, and even after; a soft greenish twilight lighted up by emerald stars being the sign of fair weather in the outer world. It was so decidedly still within those precincts that the words of the joyous party fell upon the air loud and clear, and gave François and his companions the feeling that they were in some remote wilderness where the foot of man had never ventured. Yet, every now and then, they were brought to realize their nearness to civilization by hearing Bud call out to Nellie: "Ho, there, get back in that there furrow!" or

"Over the traces, ri-ght—O!" A big fox squirrel scurried through the tree tops, and Virginia shuddered and cried "Ugh!" as she grabbed Flora's arm.

"Look out for spooks! Captain, Virgie's had her warning!" exclaimed Flora.

When Virginia finally saw the sleek fellow with his bushy, arched tail, she clapped hands and wished the Captain would catch him for her. What would he not have given to satisfy her childlike whim!

Thus they proceeded, nature's touch transforming their hearts' desires for the moment into the fantastic wishes of childhood days and recalling to each their one-time longing for the reality of fairies and genii.

Captain François diverted the joyous chatter by saying:

"Besides wishing you to see the dogwoods beyond the high ground, there is another reason why I wish you to walk here with me.

"When I was a small boy, my father preferred me to be alone rather than play with the few children then inhabiting these parts. Being the only child at home, I was often lonesome, so I roamed about the woods and hills seeking the prettiest spots in which to spend my long summer

days. In wandering thus I discovered this walk. It struck my fancy. On yonder knoll, above the path, I built my playhouse. I shouldn't be surprised to find it intact, as this place is so little frequented. When a few minutes ago, you spoke of your mothers coming this way to go to Mrs. Dade's I confess, I thought, and I'm still inclined to think, you may be mistaken as to this being the same spot or walk. At any rate, no one ever disturbed me here. Even after I became older and began playing with the Dade boys I refrained from taking them to see my playhouse, principally because I was afraid they would laugh at me for being what they would call, like a girl. So, you are the first to be taken into this sanctuary of my childhood."

"How do you know Virginia and I won't come every day and sew doll dresses in it?"

"Captain François!" cried Virginia, "I think it would show our appreciation of your original tastes. We might occasionally ask you to tea."

"And I'd be delighted to come. You may use it for any purpose you like."

Laughing and joking like children off for an afternoon, they walked on under the trees until they came to the rise to which Captain François had referred. At that point, they ascended a sharp

incline, using the roots of a large oak for steps, and came out on a curious looking little plateau, not more than a dozen yards square, shaded about by dwarf cedars. François declared it was by the merest accident that he had discovered the place, since from the path, twenty feet below, the plateau which was surrounded by trees, looked like an isolated cedar glade rising above two fallen monarchs of the forest. Anyway, he found it by chasing a young rabbit up the stairway formed by the old tree. Later on he carried large stones to the plateau, erected low walls about a space, and constructed seats within. The whole interior, walls and seats, were carefully plastered over with a thick coating of earth and finished off by an upholstering of beautiful mosses. Many days were consumed in the task, but the labor was amply rewarded by the production of a playhouse that endured through the changes of seasons.

Virginia climbed on one of the seats and surveyed the surroundings.

"What a strategic point. Captain, you must always have had the soldier's instinct. Do you know that one can sit right here and see perfectly all who pass in the path below, and himself remain unobserved? Why the whole country below is at your mercy!"

"Of course when I spoke of this place being secluded I had reference to this plateau or else the path below would not exist—although very few about here know anything about it—. You have no idea how I enjoyed myself here,—watching people going along the walk, and very often shooting deer from the very seat on which you are standing."

"Why didn't you call it your fort instead of your playhouse?" asked Flora.

"Really it does seem more like a fort. Do tell us about the shooting," and Virginia got down from her perched position and seated herself on the soft mossy bench. The others did likewise, the two girls assuming a listening attitude.

"There is very little to tell. That large boulder by the path happens to mark what is known among hunters as a deer crossing."

"What's that?" asked Flora.

"A deer crossing? Well, that's a place at which the deer always cross in going for water or in changing from one grazing ground to another. Old deer stalkers discover these crossings, and erect platforms in trees—just a few planks nailed to the branches—where they go and wait for the deer to come along. Such an ambush is called a deer stand. In playing about this knoll, I found out

the habits of the wily buck and his drove, and many a one did I pick off with my rifle. I think I must have killed ten or eleven, and for a youngster that was thought wonderful. However, very little did I care about what people thought of me, it made my playhouse intensely interesting."

"You mean your fort," persisted Flora. "But how did you contrive to keep the place a secret from everyone. Such a unique spot!"

"Do you mean you never told your mother?" asked Virginia.

"I told her after a few years, when I was just turning fifteen."

"I'm so glad. Then you brought her to see it—your combination of fort and deer stand?"

"No, Miss Flora, and I'm very sorry now. For here except when I was a child playing about with Mother, I spent the pleasantest days of my young life. Somehow, she was generally too busy to accompany me, then, I went away shortly after telling her."

"Did you never want to come back to it?" asked Flora.

"I became too busy with other things, and it was ten years before I returned. Miss Virginia knows my history; she may tell you about it some day. This is my first visit since I've come back

and I find the spot practically the same as when I left it."

Something in the tone of François's voice had seemed to Flora to indicate that he did not wish to be pressed to say any more about the past, so very tactfully she refrained from insisting, and pointed out objects that interested her. As she turned her head to see what lay in the direction back of her, she caught a glimpse of the flowering dogwood trees through the network of the intervening cedar and oak branches. Nothing would keep her back and leaving Virginia with François she flew down the root stairway and ran down the path to the point where she could see the valley beyond converted into a snow bank with its hundreds of blossoming trees standing out in bold relief against the background of various hues of green surmounted by the barren rocky crest of Dry Bones.

When she returned with the firm intention of dragging her companions, if necessary, to view this scene of surpassing charm, talking volubly all the while as soon as she could make herself distinctly heard, she was astounded by the strange lack of response her exclamations aroused in François.

"We'll see it later," he said.

No one spoke for several minutes. François seemed absorbed in thought; Virginia, probably pondered over some remark he had made while alone with him; and Flora looked from one to the other in amazement.

François showed plainly that he was far from having recovered his normal strength. During his meditation his hands were used in helping him prop himself up and his lips twitched as if he were in the grip of some strong emotion that he was unable to cope with. At last he spoke but in a low, subdued voice, very different in quality from the merry tones that rang out but a short while before.

"Miss Flora, and you, Miss Virginia, you have both been so kind to me that I feel you will listen to me and allow me to unburden my heart to you. Miss Virginia was a child when I went away, years ago, and could not possibly remember me, but," and he looked straight at her, "you were, perhaps, present at my father's and mother's strange burial, and have since then heard the people's version of it, as you must have heard the rumors also afloat about our connection with some secret crime in Paul François's past life. That it has had no effect on you and Miss Flora I have sufficient proof in the loyalty of your friendship, still, I feel

I owe it to myself to explain what I know of the whole affair. Will you give me your attention for half an hour?"

The girls bowed their heads in acknowledgement of the permission silently given.

Very simply, François told about his home life. He touched upon the devotion and goodness of his father and mother,—his father although strict to the verge of harshness was the soul of honor. Then he spoke of the trials that had attended his youth on account of his misunderstanding his father's ideals. "Once," he said, and his face contracted, "I'm not quite sure I should mention this, but I hope you will not misconstrue my motive, there came here a person, a lady I have met since, and that is what puzzles me more than I can possibly explain. She called on my father, for what purpose I cannot say, only I know that my boyish ignorance at the time saw fit to criticize her—I imagined she wanted to win my father away from my mother—and my anger knew no bounds. Now I see that my father acted honorably for I can understand better to-day the conversation that took place between them, and that I accidently overheard. But on account of this—my having overheard them—my father beat me unmercifully. I think it was because he was enraged that the

people about should interpret his conduct as dishonorable, so he worked off his spite on me with the result that I left home at the age of fifteen."

"And do you mean to say that you have seen that person recently?" asked the irrepressible Flora.

"Yes," said François, "but that makes very little difference. All I care about is that my father is absolutely guiltless of any crime. I think it useless to appeal to the person in question, she does no seem responsible, although I could possibly obtain from her a clue to the thing that embittered my father's life. Understand well, there is something in his past that I can not explain, but that it is nothing criminal, I am positive. It's probably some great sorrow due to disappointment.

"I am certain of it when I recall what took place the afternoon before I left home. If I speak of it, it is without anger or bitterness in my heart: It was a little after midday, and Mother who had put away the dinner things, joined father and me near the front door of our cabin where we were at work mending an old windlass chain. She sat a little apart from us, facing me, and her fingers plied long steel knitting needles most industriously, row after row adding themselves to the heavy brown woolen sock more than half finished. I re-

member well, for every once in a while I stole a glance in her direction and several times caught her blue eyes fixed sadly on me. I studied the lines on her face and noted with a tightening at my heart that she must be well on in years—past fifty. I became fidgety and let go the end of the chain I was supporting for Father. His coal black eyes pierced through mine, then I hung my head, and he turned to Mother to try discover the cause of my absentmindedness. I do not know if he caught one of her sad glances and misinterpreted it. I had no time to realize anything. As if seized with a sudden mania, he took hold of me by the arms and beat me until I thought I would die. I heard Mother sob and saw her gray head bend low, then in an instant her dark homespun gown fluttered past me and I saw her no more—that night when she called her boy as she must have done, he was miles away. When I thought Father had finished and I was watching my chance to get off, he glared at me in such a manner as I shall never forget and said: 'Tell me all you know,' after I repeated as nearly as I could what I had heard, he beat me again to make me acknowledge all the conversation that took place. I had missed part of it. 'Tell me,' he cried ready to strike again, but his hand fell to his side while he continued in

an even more threatening voice: 'I declare I have done no wrong. This woman—nor any other, no not a living being have I harmed. If I'm here to-day, groveling among backwoodsmen and trying to make a man of you while I slave to sustain life, it is because of what I've done, the good I've done others. If anyone ever accuses your father of dishonest dealings, strike him dead, I say.' "

François stopped and looked about him with wide open eyes, as if surprised at finding himself anywhere but at the front door of the old cabin, so vividly had the last scene of his home life reimpressed itself upon his mind while recounting its least details. Flora and Virginia kept their eyes fixed on some point among the trees and did not move.

In a slightly relieved voice, Captain François continued:

"That I was all in all to him, I have no doubt, but his affection took a peculiar form. In his earnest efforts to bring out the best in me, to 'make a man' of me he was often cruel. However, I believe in him, and I'm ready to defend his honor with my life at any time. I could not understand in those days, and preferred to make a man of myself all on my own, but it was that I

might return and receive his blessing and my mother's embrace.

"After years I came back. I shall not speak of my travels, I've done so before at various times."

Thus he ended abruptly his history. What happened on his return was known to both girls, but more especially to Virginia.

The tale told, a pause followed, in which it seemed beyond the power of either of the girls to speak. The insight the narrative had given into the home life of François seemed to impress them curiously.

At last, Flora leaned over quite far over the parapet of the wall and strained her eyes down the path.

"Why," she said in an astonished voice, "I declare if that doesn't look like the form of Mrs. Douglas coming up this way!"

Virginia peered over her friend's shoulder:

"Nobody else but the old lady herself!—Theresa, as she prefers to be called."

"Theresa!" cried François, "I did not know she was called Theresa," but the girls were not listening to him. "And still I did know, too, only I'd forgotten."

He was more astonished than either of the girls. As he looked, many things ran through his mind;

namely, his suspicions of Douglas and his son, and his putting off quizzing the old man to discover if he knew his father,also the coincidence that Douglas's wife and his father's visitor of many years ago were one and the same. He felt himself become faint, as he thought: "What have I done to clear my father's name?"

Quickly recovering himself, he requested Flora and Virginia to sit down and stop talking. It was necessary to stand in order to see, he reminded them. There were many portholes between the cedar branches.

On and on Theresa came, looking so intently up the path that the trio might have remained standing in the open wood without being observed by her. In fact, so strained was Theresa's stare that all three turned to see what could be attracting such close attention. They saw nothing at the moment, but after looking at each other for a minute, they seemed by tacit agreement to decide on the same course, which was to watch Theresa. The old lady appeared to know exactly what she was doing, and that she had timed her walk at the proper time the three watchers in nature's turret were now quite convinced: Dan Douglas came rapidly in sight, riding as if bent on an errand of life and death.

"Oho!" nearly gasped Flora, "What's this?" She spoke the last in a stage whisper.

François's "Sh—" hushed her.

Virginia stood motionless.

By that time Theresa stood in the path just opposite them, and Dan who came up, seemed surprised beyond words at finding his mother there.

"Theresa!" he called to her as he was obliged to stop to keep from knocking her down—there was no room for him to pass.

"Will you never call me Mother?" asked the feeble woman pleadingly.

"No," he replied harshly.

"And, why, Dan?"

"Because you've disgraced Father and me. But we can't discuss that now. It's usless to discuss it at all, at any time. Why do you persist in staying about here? to play on public sympathy? That might do very well with Flora Birsch and her mother but not with us. Trying to cast suspicion on us in Birsch's mind? He's too much of a business man not to know on which side his bread's buttered. He'll get his wife and daughter to put you out of his home some day."

Theresa seemed to be writhing under her son's abuse.

"Hasn't Father provided for you handsomely?

You've spoiled his life, now you want to spoil mine. I've had a time explaining you off to Virginia and her mother without laying you too low."

"Dan," she screamed, "You do not know what you are saying." Her shrill voice rang through the woods.

"Then why do you persist in staying about here? It's a wonder to me people don't talk about you more than they do. I supposed they believe Father's story, — incompatability, high temper, by the way I've heard something of the last."

"Please, Dan, just this once listen to me, your mother?"

"No, I won't and I can't—but how in the devil did you get here?"

"I found out you'd gone to see the workmen in the valley, and you were coming this way because you didn't want to be seen in the village. Besides, you're leaving to-night for New York, and—it is not to plead for myself I've come here,—it's—to save you, Dan, my son."

"Save me!—you're out of your mind. When there'll be any saving I'll do it myself. Begone! Let me pass, I say!" With that he rushed by and his horse clattered down towards the valley.

A deathlike silence reigned in the turret for a

while. Virginia had stretched out her hands and was scarcely aware that Captain François had seized one and held it clasped in both of his. She was deathly pale and leaned on Flora who had thrown an arm protectingly about her. On the path not a sound was to be heard. Flora looked back and shuddered, she pulled François by the sleeve and motioned for him to look.

Theresa had swooned away on the ground.

"We must go to her help," he whispered, but as Virginia did not move, he still held on to her hand. François and Flora looked down upon the heap of clothing, fascinated. They could not see Theresa's face and it looked as if she had flown away bodily and left her garments behind. Virginia did not seem to realize that anything unusual was happening at the moment. She was stunned.

Just as Flora sought to disengage herself from her, and the Captain had finally turned to go to the old lady's assistance, quite forgetful of his own weakened condition, a face, white and tear-stained raised itself from the ground and the worn figure sought to get on her knees, all the time her lips moved as if in prayer.

Then she cried aloud in anguish. Her voice,

as it rang through the woods sounded guttural and unnatural:

"Oh! that I were not a curse upon earth! I say nothing of my woes, but I see my sin, and my husband's revived in our son. Greed is driving him. As for me, I ruined the life of the man who loved me, causing him to hide in these hills, and—when I sought him, he drove me from him like a thing of evil."

She rocked to and fro and continued in a lower voice:

"Woe is the day of my birth when my own son scorns me! If only the harm I've done or allowed could stop here, but my son is bent on ruining the son of Paul; and when I appeal to him he refuses to listen to me, his mother! To him I am Theresa, the woman! yes the woman brought low by humiliation. Here I groveled at his feet in the dust and he spurned me! My son, my son Dan, how could you speak thus to me? It seems that my first mistake cursed all, and now the curse follows up descendants—works in a circle—and swishes over me in each round with a terrible hiss. Ah! I'm altogether undone. But, my son, how can you deceive him, the man who trusts you? May God who has chastised me so severely, stop you in time and cause you to repent!"

At first, it seemed that the shrill voice shrieking through the woods must belong to another than the frail, bent creature kneeling in the path. Gradually her voice weakened, and the last words she spoke sounded in her natural voice. Except for their deep significance she might have been supposed to speak to herself, so little did she seem excited.

To the great surprise of François and his two companions she arose without any effort and retraced her steps. The trio remained speechless as they watched Theresa stoop by the roadside and pluck some wild flowers, arranging them with taste. Flora who generally found something to say, even at the most critical moments was stricken dumb; to her the old lady's outbreak was no worse than the one that had frightened her and Mrs. Birsch,—was she really accountable for her acts? But it was the suddenness of it all that upset her, and Dan's cruelty appalled her. Virginia looked painfully humiliated and helplessly looked from one to the other, pale and rigid.

Flora could stand it no longer.

"Virgie, I never told you, but Mrs. Douglas is subject to those sorts of fits."

Virginia made a desperate effort and turned to François:

"You must not consider me and my feelings. Send at once for Mr. Douglas and demand an explanation."

CHAPTER XXII.

TROUBLED WATERS.

François, Virginia, and Flora arose from the little playhouse and descended to the path. Like joyous children they had come—troubled adults they returned to the Inn.

On the way they talked of the incident and agreed to say nothing. Captain François, as soon as his health would permit, was to investigate the matter and ascertain once for all whether or not Theresa's implied accusation was founded on fact or existed only in her excited mind. That satisfied Virginia and Flora. Purposely they refrained from discussing Dan's conduct, but it left a sting in Virginia's heart, which even her friend's devotion could not remove.

They were destined to feel again, before reaching the Inn, the power of some intangible force which drew them out of the ordinary channel of life, into a back stream whose waters, troubled and murky, were to try sorely those who struggled in its eddies. Captain François sustained the first shock.

He complained of sharp pains in his chest, and the last hundred yards of the walk that led to Dade's home were made very slowly while he leaned heavily on Virginia and Flora for support.

Dr. Keith was summoned and his verdict alarmed the captain's friends. The physician questioned the girls to discover if any undue excitement, or accident, such as slipping, might not be responsible for the relapse. Then as they remained silent, he declared the walk and climbing had proved too much of a strain on his recently healed wounds.

Everything that could possibly be done was attempted to stay the pursuing hand that insisted upon smiting the unfortunate man, but it was all in vain. Fever attacked him furiously, and he fell in an unconscious state once more. Dr. Keith remained at his side during the night, studying every heart beat. Virginia and Flora and their mothers assisted old Silas in nursing him, while Bud rode off to St. Mary's on an errand for the doctor.

Beyond admitting that they walked through the glen as far as the valley, the girls said nothing. But, as they passed each other in the wide, still halls, and whispered about the thing requiring immediate attention, they searched one another's

face as if for permission to tell what had really taken place. But the feeling that it concerned Captain François more than themselves sealed their lips.

That same evening news came to the Inn that Dan, who had just arrived in Bonne Terre a day or so before, was leaving for New York. "It seems that he wasn't quite pleased at not finding you home," Mrs. Bardsdell said to Virginia when she arrived at the Inn. "He says he saw you helping Captain François walk, and that it's high time he should be getting along without your assistance. I'm sure, however, that he will not leave without seeing you."

"I care very little about what he thinks," replied her daughter. "If he does not wish to come, he's welcome to go."

Mrs. Bardsdell looked astounded, but Virginia walked away quickly without explanation.

Later, Dan called.

Virginia received him on the porch. She spoke very coldly and indifferently of his proposed trip, and there was something in her face that unnerved him so, that he refrained from pressing her to confide in him. Besides, since his return, except on the occasion that gave rise to the conversation between Virginia and Flora, he was gener-

ally too engrossed in his own pleasures to consult her whims, as he called her wishes or fancies.

"Do you mean that you're going to stay here indefinitely again?" asked Dan.

Virginia raised a warning finger.

"Sh—" and she led the way to the gate.

"I suppose your mother told you I'm leaving to-night. I shall be very busy, so you mustn't expect many letters. When I—"

"Are you leaving now?" she interrupted.

"Yes."

"Then I think I'll walk down a piece with you. Dan," her voice softened perceptibly, "There is much I would like to say to you, much that I should have discussed with you before; for instance, your relations with—"

"Virginia, I have no time now. When I return we'll see about that. I suppose it's only something about the house—our house. I have more pressing business on hand now."

Virginia's heart was racked by contending emotions. One minute doubts gave way to love and she hoped that her influence over him might teach him to respect, at least, his mother's claim. She had never interfered in any way,—never hinted at anything that showed she was interested in Theresa's association with him. Now she blamed

herself for it. François was able to look out for himself. He had not put much faith in the old lady's words, but it was Dan's harsh treatment of the feeble creature that clutched her heart.

"It won't take long, Dan. You see, now that we are to be married soon, I should like us to have some understanding about your mother."

Dan turned on her angrily; "If that is what you would discuss now, Virginia, I'll say good-bye at once. I thought you were interested in the business, so I took the trouble to explain it you; as to my family affairs you just keep out of them. I'm going, go nurse your patient. I'm sick and tired of the whole lot of such as he." With that he untied his horse and was soon galloping away.

Virginia walked back to the house, saying: "I don't know his New York address, I wonder if I could get it from his father."

The next morning Dr. Keith eased the taut feeling of the household: François showed a slight improvement. He could not tell if it would continue, but there was a chance, and perhaps with good nursing a miracle might be performed.

Virginia and Flora talked often together in the anxious days that followed the ushering of the prostrate man into another long drawn-out struggle for his life, but they confided in no one, not

even the doctor when he was in the habit of shaking his head and murmuring: "Seems to me he must have had a severe mental shock. Could it be that he's in love with one of the girls? Then it must be the wrong one." The latter thoughts about being in love were kept to himself, and he no longer jollied Flora about the Captain, but instead followed Virginia with his eyes when she ministered to the sick man.

Flora gave her friend the details of Mrs. Douglas's coming to Bonne Terre and said that while they had been much annoyed at first,—she and her mother,—they had eventually accepted the old lady as an additional member of the household. Virginia reproached herself, more than ever, for not having insisted on Dan's making his mother's position clear when he returned from the war.

The two girls looked on as helpless spectators, also, while other minor events transpired one by one. The few remaining pockets shut down, and several families left the little mining town; others declared they saw the "ghost" at Paul's grave, and a fire broke out among the workmen's cottages.

Dade shook his head as he contemplated the gloomy future ahead and said: "No man knoweth what the morrow fetcheth forth, that's dead sar-

tain, but me name haint Si Dade if Bonne Terre an' all the folk haint got a hell of a time comin' to them. 'Pears like we'uns have upset a potful of evil luck. There might be good in the bottom for us critters in the end, but, howamsoiver, it's a long time getting to the bottom,—an' I says the end haint yet come."

And it was even so. Calamity falls heavily upon small communities; the people feel the sting of its thongs more keenly than do dwellers in large cities because everyone knows of the woes of everybody else.

Yet, in every village or hamlet there is at least one who sees through the darkest cloud and predicts better things, if only through a spirit of contradiction. At this time the one who came forward was the one we would least expect after the shock she received. Virginia, assisted by her admiring friend Flora, was indefatigable in her attempts at maintaining a cheerful spirit about the Inn. Father Duncan was also invaluable during that period. Virginia, for some time, stunned by the hint of Dan's duplicity and his very real cruelty to a helpless woman with the greatest of claims upon his consideration, moped with the others, including Flora, who at times found her trials very heavy; but, as is always the case with

generous natures, her heartaches made her sympathize with the sufferings of those about her, and she threw herself bravely in their midst, the optimist of the group, despite the gloom which hung over her own future.

At last, Captain François improved to the point where Doctor Keith permitted him to sit up again, and the occasion was befittingly celebrated by Virginia and Flora. The latter, in her present state of mind and attitude towards François was more of a comfort to him than formerly. He discovered the change one day when after reading to him for a while, Bud Dade came into the room and asked Flora to accompany him to the village. Previously, not even the Doctor's thinly veiled teazing could have induced her to leave him, although she seemed ready enough to run away from his searching eyes.

Mrs. Douglas left the Birsches shortly after the Captain's illness. She seemed wonderfully rejuvenated as if buoyed up by sudden hope, and as Dade watched her get into the buggy that was to convey her to the railway, he exclaimed to himself:

"She haint lost none of her pert ways, nohow, an' she haint a badlooker, no she haint! I wonder why old Douglas holds against her so spitefully,

he must keep his eyes fixed tuther way when she comes prancing along, sort of like a horse's fancy steps."

Flora told Virginia about her going and said she thought after all the old lady had done enough mischief, even if she was not such a bad sort, but that Bonne Terre could get along very well without her.

A letter from Donald Douglas to Adolf Birsch cast a very real gleam of light on the situation at Bonne Terre. Flora's father announced to the inhabitants that Mr. Douglas gave well-founded hopes that great sums of money would be raised to develop the mines. The securing of the necessary capital became the general theme for a number of conjectures and all the members of the small community warmed up on the subject. Virginia, reserving in her mind a possibility that after all, as far as dishonesty was concerned, Dan might be guiltless; in fact, hurt though she was, she would not condemn him on such evidence as Theresa furnished in her excited state at the time. She was ready to endorse any promissory note of good fortune for Bonne Terre, and Flora backed her. Father Duncan assured the good people that pretty soon a new era of prosperity would make them forget hard times.

Since the war, Bud Dade had become devoted to François, and during the Captain's illness he was untiring in his care of him. Consequently, he was brought into close association with Virginia and Flora, and during the period of convalescence when the friends exchanged ideas altogether undreamed of by the sturdy backwoodsman, he held back for a while from them, realizing his lack of education. The reading hours had a strange fascination for Bud, which François observed with a keen interest, and one day when the two men were conversing together, Bud confided in his friend his disappointment at having missed receiving an education. The result was that François advised Bud to enroll in Simpson's private school. Under the guidance of that noble man, a healthy hunger for knowledge was stirred in him. Mr. Poston helped him out of school hours, then later, as a born teacher should do, he pointed out the way and encouraged his pupil to proceed as much as possible unassisted. François helped, and Virginia also gave him a hand up. Father Duncan placed his books at his disposal; so, very soon Bud was able to express himself in fairly good English, discarding for good the backwoods' talk.

When Mr. Poston closed his school and moved

to the Salem neighborhood, Bud continued his studies under the occasional but efficient guidance of Father Duncan.

Therefore, when Captain François became an invalid for the second time, Bud had developed into quite a capable man who held a high station in the confidence of the community, particularly in the circle of François's friends.

Flora Birsch had left off, long ago, discussing with Virginia the incident in the forest near the playhouse, but she brooded over it none the less. Finally, one day she decided to speak of it to Bud. She interpreted, rightly according to her viewpoint, that the compact of secrecy was confined to the personal matters contained in Theresa's lament. What worried her, was the point François appeared to ignore and which she did not like to mention anew to Virginia, the question of Dan's duplicity towards the Master of Bonne Terre.

Accordingly, one day while Virginia was reading to the Captain as he sat in an easy chair in the shade of the trees, Flora stole away to take a walk with Bud. On the way she told him of her fears —that Dan Douglas and his father away in the East meant to work some underhanded treachery against François. Bud, of course, could not understand her mistrust of the Douglases, so Flora

under the seal of strict confidence, told him as much as she thought she might say, which came near being the whole affair.

Bud was interested and readily grasped the point she meant to emphasize.

"As you know," he said, "Captain François's 600 acres form only a part, although the best part, of the mining property. The company owns several smaller tracts. I've understood from Pa that the Captain still owns his land, he's only executed a lease to Donald Douglas—a mining lease—on which he receives royalties. I do not know the status of the other lands included in the workings. The company has not been successful so far. Many believe it is because the mines are exhausted, and if the Douglases fail in securing capital to sink deeper shafts, the company must be abandoned; in which event, the lease on Captain François's land would be forfeited. While I was hopeful a short time ago, the delays experienced by the Douglases seem to forecast the downfall of Bonne Terre."

Flora was impressed by Bud's clear statement of the case.

"Has Captain François ever spoken to you on the subject?" she asked.

"Once, just before his injury in the explosion,

he referred to his lease, and said if the shaft they were sinking, the one in which the accident occurred, chanced to open up new beds of ore, he would be enabled out of his royalties to see me through college, if I were willing to accept his offer as a loan. Mr. Poston had entered his young son Jefferson in Miss Carlton's Institute, near Salem Church, and he recommended that I pursue my studies there until I could go higher up. He always urged me to study."

"That would seem to confirm the existence of the lease on François's lands? I do not quite see it, unless you mean that otherwise he would not be receiving royalties."

"Yes, and there can be no doubt about the lease."

"Then what could be the meaning of Mrs. Douglas's accusation against her son. She spoke of his betraying the man who trusted him."

"I don't believe Dan could cheat the Captain. To be frank with you, I do not think you should attach any importance to the old lady's charge. She is a disappointed woman, who for some reason or other cannot agree with her husband. I believe that the ravings you heard are the result of a disordered mind. Mr. Douglas is a man of ex-

cellent traits whom we have known these many years."

Nevertheless, Bud lost no time in proceeding to Farmington, the county seat of St. François County, and in order to satisfy Flora, he engaged the services of William Carter, attorney and counsel at law, to examine the titles to lands in and about Bonne Terre. Mr. Carter informed him, in written opinion, that the titles to all the surrounding tracts were in five names, all of whom proved to be men associated with Donald Douglas in the mining Company. Donald Douglas himself held title in fee simple by warranty deed to the 600 acres formerly owned by Jean François. There was no record of lease or mortgage to Jean François, so according to record, his friend, the captain, had no interest whatever in the lands.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AN APPEAL.

ALMOST at the same time that Flora and Bud Dade were looking up titles to Bonne Terre lands, Dan Douglas and his father reached a tentative agreement with New York capitalists to develop the prospects of a greater mine far beneath the exhausted pocket deposits.

Months of patient waiting and manipulation had been required to convert Eastern mining men to the theory of deeper veins of lead ore, but finally, upon the convincing arguments of the St. Louis engineer, strongly bolstered up by Dan's money, wisely spent in entertainment, a half dozen rich men formed a syndicate to open up the bowels of the earth at Blue Hill, and thereby win a great mine, or lose their money and charge it to experience. The contract was being drawn by a lawyer, and after the signing there was to be given a banquet at the Astor House. The affair was to take place on Wednesday.

This was the day before — Tuesday. Mrs.

Douglas, accompanied by a maid, approached the desk at the Astor House, and inquired if Messrs. Donald Douglas and Dan Douglas were guests in the hotel. Receiving an affirmative reply, the old lady engaged rooms for herself and companion. The clerk informed her that the gentlemen she spoke of usually returned to the hotel for seven o'clock dinner.

However, that night, father and son were dining out with members of the syndicate, not waxing enthusiastic over the hunt for the greater mine in the small Missouri town. A messenger brought a note to the proprietor of the hotel informing him that the gentlemen in question would not return until ten. When Theresa learned of their postponed arrival she showed considerable impatience.

She addressed herself to the clerk at the desk once more:

"Will you be so kind as to forward to Mr. Douglas a note which I shall write?"

"I'm sorry, Madam, but Mr. Douglas does not state in his letter where he can be found."

He kept on with his work, then as Mrs. Douglas did not move away he said:

"I presume—that is, you are probably Mr. Douglas's wife. In that case he should know of your arrival."

Theresa realized she risked arousing suspicion in the mind of the self-important young man, so smiling amiably, replied:

"Of course, he should know, but you see I'm treating myself to a little amusement—in—in coming in unawares when he thinks me far away. I admit I have no right to become impatient because he is not on hand."

The clerk looked at her more kindly. Theresa felt encouraged and tried to advance her cause a little.

"I'll tell you what I'll do. If you do not mind, I'll wait in the parlor until they both come in, then as they return tell them a friend—no, say two friends—have shortly come to the hotel, specially to see them, and that they can be found in the parlor."

There was a certain amount of childishness about Theresa's manner that to a stranger concealed the astuteness of her plotting. The clerk who was at first indifferent, when he saw a crisp bill held carelessly between her fingers, awoke to the possibilities of the situation and hastened to assure Mrs. Douglas he would do all in his power to hurry the meeting. The minute the gentlemen came back they would be informed, and he, himself, would escort them to the parlor. The

bill changed hands and the clerk set down his pen and accompanied Theresa to her room for fear she might make a mistake. "Mr. Douglas is sure to be delighted," he added as he left her.

"He *should be*" murmured Theresa to herself, nervously.

Quite thirty years back, when Theresa was turned away by her husband, he settled upon her several thousand dollars, and throughout their long estrangement, she managed to hold on to the money without ever allowing herself to want for anything. On the advice of a friend, she had been fortunate in investing it, and occasionally she was even enabled to afford some luxuries, such as her present trip to New York, stopping at the best hotel, etc.

On this special Tuesday, Mrs. Douglas dined well, and an hour before time, repaired to the luxurious parlor to await therein the coming of her husband and son. She well knew her presence would provoke a storm, and in spite of her spirit and self-will she was afraid of both men. This was a most unexpected move on her part, but she had decided upon it as we shall see later as her sole chance of winning over her husband. If this failed then there was no hope. The person who urged her to it had no doubts whatever of the re-

sult and she tried hard to believe it would be so, realizing that a great deal depended on her curbing her high-strung temperament.

Ten o'clock struck. She had passed the time so far, patiently although anxiously. Now she watched the doorway, starting at every footstep that sounded in the marble hallway. Once she passed into an adjoining room but returned shortly, and for the space of a few minutes seemed slightly relieved.

Eleven o'clock rolled around. The clock in Trinity Tower sounded twelve. The strain on her nerves was telling; it seemed that she must cry. Her severe illness in Bonne Terre had enfeebled her and her age was more apparent than a few years before. Miss Mead, who sat at the other end of the parlor, watched her and became fearful that Theresa could not stand the interview. Miss Mead, who was more of a companion and friend than maid—although registered in the latter capacity—had known Mrs. Douglas for many years and it was to her the old lady had gone when she left the Birsches. A kind, flexible, impulsive dispositioned spinster several years younger than Theresa, she had readily consented to lend herself to Theresa's scheme of surprising her husband in New York—the romantic meeting interested her

beyond words and the two had planned its least details, that is as far as they were concerned. But once arrived in New York, Miss Mead had been put aside. Despite her entreaties, Theresa had insisted on attending to some business which she declared was very pressing and had not confided in her companion, and about the final arrangement for the meeting she was in the dark. She would have given anything to follow Theresa out of the room when she retired in the earlier part of the evening.

A little after twelve, Theresa made sign to Miss Mead to retire. She remonstrated, but being acquainted with Theresa's imperative manners, she submitted meekly and left the parlor.

A few minutes later, Theresa's keen ears caught the sound of Dan's voice coming along the hall and nerved herself to bear the ordeal.

The clerk had received specific instructions to admit both men to the front parlor and received an extra tip to close the door after them. Mrs. Douglas was then to pass into the second parlor so as not to be seen from the entrance—she was to keep well out of sight of the archway.

She heard the door closed and felt the presence of the two men whose footsteps were muffled by

the thick carpets. Then she came forward and halted under the hanging lamps.

Father and son leered at her through bloodshot eyes. They staggered back astounded, oaths all but pronounced on their lips.

"Be seated, my husband and my son," said Theresa, affecting the motherly way she might have used in her own home.

"Humph!" snarled Dan vehemently, "come Dad, let's get out of this."

Donald Douglas, unyielding to others, was always ready to obey his son. He turned to go.

Theresa's wits were ready for emergencies. In fact after her rebuke in the forest, nothing short of being struck could surprise her. She knew what would arrest their exit.

"Surely," she said in a remarkably calm voice, "with to-morrow, a contract of prime importance to be signed, you will not pack me off to bed when I can tell you something to your advantage."

"What contract are you talking about?" asked Dan angrily. "I told you long ago, before leaving, Bonne Terre, that she was spying on us, Father."

Donald Douglas was bewildered. He was half way to the door when Theresa mentioned the

contract, but Dan had rushed to his mother's side, wildly excited.

"Be calm, Dan," he said, "remember we are in a public place, and she," pointing to Theresa, "has probably registered as my wife."

"Yes," and he looked straight at his mother, "I suppose you bribed the clerk to set this trap for us."

"You were speaking of a contract," Mr. Douglas said tentatively.

"And I want to know what you *know* about it," Dan spoke through clinched teeth."

Theresa was not slow in grasping that she had the upper hand of the situation. Long years of battling for herself had developed her keenness, equal to almost any man's.

"Well, Dannie, if you'll give your old mother a chance she'll tell you."

"The devil with your Dannie. My name is Daniel."

"I read the contract to-day, Daniel."

"Pa, do you hear that? why don't you speak out?"

Donald Douglas had heard and the knowledge sobered him in a second. He stood at attention.

Theresa pointed to chairs, and the father sank

into one at once. Dan remained standing but Theresa took a seat facing her husband.

Dan could not understand his father and looked disgusted.

"Well?" he asked with the ring of an ugly demand in his voice.

Donald Douglas was busy mopping his brow. He looked distinctly uncomfortable. Heretofore, in Theresa's attempts at reconciliation he had always been successful in evading her, and this was the first time that father and son were caught together. When Dan became old enough to know, Donald gave him his version of the separation. But now, what was Theresa going to say, what part of his past was she going to drag before his eyes—and his son's? The contract which seemed to be the chief topic of discussion was merely a bluff, so he thought.

"Now, Daniel, please remain quiet while I speak with your father."

Donald thought of calling for help, but how could he do so without awaking suspicion.

"I haven't followed you here," continued Theresa, "to upbraid you in the style you imagine, but to point out dangers that await you. I must be heard. Fortunately, I'm in a position to

force an audience for myself, but if you permit me to speak you will have nothing to regret."

"On with it then."

"Yes, my son, only be patient."

"Theresa," put in Donald, "since you insist on talking with me, would it not be better that Dan go?"

"No, Donald; it is time that there be no secrets between us that our son does not share. It will be easier for both of us."

"Then, if you have come here on purpose to prejudice my son against me, I insist on his leaving the room."

"Donald, do you think me a foolish woman, when for thirty years I've kept your secret and my own counsel, in the face of your treatment?"

"Say on then."

"I must begin with a confession:

"Since being forced out alone into the world by you, only once did I come near to doing any wrong. Nearly fifteen years ago, I tried to win a man away from his family, a good man you and I knew years ago, but he scorned me. My senses returned, and I fled, lest, in my loneliness I be tempted again. That was the first and only thing of which I am ashamed.

"When Dan was a baby, you drove me away.

You accused me of a wrong of which I am innocent."

"That is enough, Theresa."

"It is not!" she cried with a note of anger in her voice, but she calmed herself, "You are compelled to listen to me."

Donald had risen but he reseated himself.

"You accused me falsely of unbecoming conduct with a young man by the name of David Ryan. The circumstances condemned me and nothing I could say would convince you of my innocence. There was no alternative for me but to submit to your verdict since I could never find the chief witness in the case. For the sake of my boy I remained silent.

"I was young, so, by and by, I lived thoughtlessly, not sinfully, for I never forgot I had a son, and also a husband if I could prove my innocence, which I hoped to do some day. During the last years when I lived so close to you in Bonne Terre, I was tolerated by some—a few—all the others regarded me with suspicion as nearly everybody has done since you disowned me. It was hard for me to hold up my head and not sink under your abuse and my son's whenever I attempted to explain to you.

"While in Bonne Terre, I had very little to

say, but I observed a good deal what was going on. For some time now, I've suspected Dan and you, too, Donald, of coveting Jean François's lands. Now, Donald, I want to ask you, if of all men in the world, his father's son should not be—"

"Theresa!" cried Donald, "What do you mean?"

"I see you understand, and we shall discuss that another time; for the present let us say, consideration at your hands."

"Twaddle!" cried Dan, "What I'm interested in is the contract."

"I'm coming to it," said Theresa with dignity. "I tried to speak with Dan in the woods, just before he came here, but he thrust me aside as if I were a common woman. So, I came here with the firm intention of having you acknowledge me or—to hunt you both down mercilessly and have revenge for my wasted life. Of that I am repentant,—I would do you no harm.

"But fortune favored my quest. Yesterday, while searching for you, whom should I meet, after all these years, but David Ryan. He did not know me, but I should have known him anywhere, in this world or the next—being connected, though unintentionally, with my unhappiness, his face has burned itself into my memory. I have searched for him in every part of this land, in

order to vindicate myself before you and my son. I have devoted my life to it, and not until during the war did I give up and believe him dead. He is alive, Donald."

"What has he to do with the contract?" asked Dan, bent on being ugly, as he threw himself in an armchair and yawned.

"In your syndicate you have a man named Henry J. Ryan. He is David Ryan's son."

Both men sprang to their feet and stared at each other. Henry Ryan was the only man not wholly convinced of the feasibility of their plan.

"Be seated. I know your fears. I see you think I have interfered with your scheme.

"In past years I've spent much time in New York, and lived in the family of Mr. Dean, the man who invested my money for me, and the same lawyer who is drawing up your contract. Mr. Dean has been very kind to me, has always believed in my innocence, and is willing to vouch for my past life. So, naturally, when I arrived in New York a few days ago, I went to his home. Yesterday, I saw him for the first time during my present visit, and he is the one told me where you and Dan were stopping. He mentioned that you were both very successful business men, and spoke of drawing up your business papers. You

need not start—he did not betray you. What I know, I found out myself. I went to his office with his daughter, and while there managed to get hold of the contract and read it. Henry Ryan's name awoke my curiosity,—my hunting mania—and I went to him. Result, I found out David Ryan is his father, called on him and told him my story. The instant I set eyes on him I could have sworn to his identity. He was dumbfounded and pained beyond words, and Donald, you will forgive me if I worked on your feelings about the contract, it is to meet Mr. Ryan that I've detained you and Dan. Mr. Ryan is now in the hotel. Shall I call him?"

The two men were unable to answer but stared at each other while Theresa stepped to the door of an adjoining parlor, disappeared for a few seconds and returned with David Ryan.

"Ah, this is Donald Douglas, indeed! How are you Daniel?" and the man's voice, big and hearty filled the parlor.

"Very well, Mr. Ryan," replied Donald who had scarcely had time to collect his thoughts.

"And this is my son Dan, Mr. Ryan," Theresa looked proudly at her son who arose bewildered to great the newcomer.

"Why, my friends, how pleasant to meet you

again, and with a grown son. I, too, have such a boy—but you know him, I believe?"

"Yes, yes," said Donald.

David Ryan's open, genial ways seemed to pierce through his reserve but feebly. He looked sheepish.

"Let's talk over old times," and Ryan motioned the party to seats. "It's been many years since we met, Donald. You see I went to Montreal after leaving St. Louis, and only returned here two years ago.

"It's been a good thirty years since I dined with you in your home."

"So it has, Ryan."

"Now, Douglas, it's no use my beating about the bush. You and your son know why I'm here, and when I tell you I was shocked and grieved—I do not think I can ever be forgiven for being the cause of your unhappy quarrel and separation! I could scarcely believe I understood Mrs. Douglas aright when she related me the story of her broken life! Is it possible, Donald, that you thought me such a scoundrel all these years?—when I was doing the best I knew to be honest and live a good, clean life? Great Scotts! man! what can I do to make up for it? There's Mrs. Douglas, an old woman now—I beg your pardon

—thrown out of her home, and I the innocent cause of it all, but still the cause. I never slept a wink the night after she told me, and I've been walking the floor of that room over yonder, ready to run in here on the shortest notice."

No one spoke so Ryan kept on.

"We must come to an understanding. I can quite see how your inflexible honesty and your standard of life would make you unbending to this hour, and I must explain exactly a situation that brought about such lasting consequences. Knowing you to be always a just man—I'm convinced you never committed a wrong act in your life—mistakes, of course, we all make mistakes—but nothing more. Do you know I always kept you in mind as my ideal?"

Ryan was talking volubly, asking questions; fortunately not expecting any reply. As for Donald Douglas, he was really and honestly living over his past although he winced under Ryan's praise.

"Permit me, Donald my friend, in the presence of your wife and son, who must undoubtedly have suffered from this long estrangement, to assure you that the wrong you charge your wife with was never done, nor even ever contemplated.

"And that she could never explain will be evi-

dent to you when I make you acquainted with a story that you can have verified by my wife any day. It is a funny story—that is I considered it so until I heard Theresa's version of it. Had you and I been more special friends a letter, even a chance letter from me would have set things right. But instead it seemed that the fact your wife and I played together when children made matters worse. We were really better acquainted with each other and it is through her that I learned to admire you so much.

"The story lies wrapped up in my own love affair. When I left St. Louis so suddenly, I ran away with Urcella Haggard. Her infuriated father followed us to Montreal, and liked me so well that he forgave our escapade and spent the remainder of his life with Urcella and me."

"Stop, Ryan. You need not explain further. Urcella Haggard would never have married a villian. And is that what you were doing in my house at that time—getting ready for the elopement?"

"No, not quite that, Donald, and that's what misled you. It was something worse to me at the time. Urcella's father had an inkling of our proposed marriage which was to take place in St. Louis, and I was being watched in the streets to

be kidnapped. It was a mad idea of the old man's—if you ever knew him you cannot have forgotten his eccentricity."

"I did know him in a way but—I was too—annoyed and did not connect his disappearence with yours. I do not yet quite see—."

"As I said it was a mad idea, but Mr. Haggard had my house watched by detectives and in order to get out, I was forced to make my way over the roofs of houses. When I came to yours, I took the liberty of opening windows and going through. If you remember, your house was a storey higher than the others. I meant to explain and before passing down the back stairway I knocked at a door; I suppose it must have been Theresa's room. It was late and I received no answer. I heard a ring at the front door and fearing it might be the detectives I made for an exit as fast as I could, on the way I came face to face with your wife, naturally she looked startled but I did not wait to speak with her. What happened later, I heard from her own lips yesterday."

Donald cleared his throat and looked distinctly uncomfortable.

"Do you comprehend why she could not explain?"

"I will not permit you to say anything further,

Ryan. That will do." Then after a second's hesitation he stammered, "but, why—?"

"I see, why did no one hear of Urcella's marriage? Well, because her father's straight-laced notions of propriety would not permit him to have the public hear of his daughter's elopement. He hushed up the matter and preferred to exile himself from his native city. He never returned to St. Louis. His lawyer wound up his business and he started all over with me in Montreal."

All the time David Ryan was speaking Dan had never once removed his eyes from him. He now looked at his father.

"Say, Dad, that was tough on the old lady."

Donald bowed his head.

Theresa, so brave until then, was crying.

Ryan arose.

"Well," said he, "I must be going. But before leaving, I'd like to feel sure that the mischief I caused is at an end. I'll never enjoy a moment's peace until I feel that matters are squared up between you. Douglas, if you and your son have anything more to ask me, I'll be in Henry's office to-morrow." With that he left the room abruptly.

When the door closed behind Mr. Ryan, Dan moved to the window and occupied himself con-

templating the dim lights along Broadway. What his attitude towards his mother was to be hereafter seemed to depend upon his father's. "It's none of my business, after all. I've enough to do paddling my own canoe. I expect there's going to be a lot of making up between those two, in the meantime they seem mighty quiet over it."

A deathlike silence continued for several seconds more, then someone opened the door and all three turned to see Miss Mead stand on the threshold.

"Who is that?" asked Donald looking at Theresa for the first time since Ryan's confession.

"My—my companion," she sobbed, "Miss Mead."

"Miss Mead, you're not wanted here for the present," said Donald.

He got up and walked across the room several times, his hands behind his back, while Theresa's companion, or maid, without replying turned on her heels and for one usually so mild, walked up the hall to her room with a look of injured dignity.

"I expect now she's got him, I'll be worse than a cast-off shoe," and similar expressions escaped her while she hastily packed her things. She was

very angry and hurt at not being more in Theresa's confidence.

Dan had cast several surreptitious glances over his shoulder without discovering any change in the position of his father and mother. By this time, the street lamps glowed like balls of fire with a spangled halo around them; and the stars seemed to dance mysteriously in the heavens. Dan was not given to much meditation nor to dangling. His father and he couldn't with any decency turn off the old woman after what Ryan had said. Oh! that there should not be a sentimental reconciliation suited him very well, but something must be done or said. Suddenly a subdued sob brought him to the realization that something was transpiring.

He wheeled about sharply to see his mother sinking on her knees before the erect, stolid form of his father, and the remembrance of the scene in the woods with his rude rebuff of the woman who had appealed to him sent the blood surging to his face.

Theresa was pleading in broken sentences.

"Pa, what's the matter with you?" he cried roughly laying a hand on his father's shoulder. "Can't you two make up without making a lot of fuss over it?" The spark of real manhood slum-

bering in his heart was fanned into a flame and lighted his eyes.

"Mother!" he cried as he took the swooning Theresa in his arms and laid her on the sofa.

Mrs. Douglas had heard and the joy was too much for her. It was the first time those lips had spoken the word.

"Dan," cried his father, "it's not what you think. I'm only wondering if we—if I'm worthy."

With that he bent and pressed his lips to his wife's forehead.

For a moment father and son's greed and scheming skulked into cover and the best in them came to the surface. As quietly as possible they conveyed Theresa to her room and both stayed with her through the night. When towards dawn, Theresa, in a semi-conscious state opened her eyes, for the first time in over twenty years, Dan cried and knelt at her bedside with his face hidden in the covers.

"Douglas," said Theresa timidly, holding out a hand.

"Yes, Theresa."

She waited another minute before speaking. Tears were welling in her eyes.

"Douglas, I want to make a request, just one."

"It is already granted, my wife."

"I—I want you to take me back to Bonne Terre and there acknowledge me as your wife. That will make me happy, even if you see fit to leave me again."

"Theresa, from this hour I shall never go from you. You—"

"But, Douglas, I wish to return alone."

The two men saw the woman's point of view in the request.

"As you wish," said the father and husband.

Dan simply shrugged his shoulders.

CHAPTER XXIV.

REJOICING.

DADE'S Inn was decorated with flowers, and dozens of lamps lighted the great cavernous halls and rooms.

Bonne Terre rejoiced.

A week before, Theresa had returned and resumed her residence at the Birsch home. She would not say what good fortune had swept away the gloom and reticence which hitherto shrouded her in mystery. What surprised Flora was to hear her ask Mr. Birsch if he had recent news of Mr. Douglas and his son. At first he frowned but her innocent look disarmed him and he spoke pleasantly in the affirmative.

Against her will and sound practical sense Flora was inveigled by the old lady into making her a dress of some pretty white satin brought down from St. Louis. "What an idea!" she said to her mother, but in trying to humor Theresa she became enthusiastic over the task.

So full was Mrs. Douglas of expectant pleas-

ure, that the curiosity of the entire village was aroused. Malinda sought Flora and in confidence said to her:

"Miss Flora, sho dat pore soul's out o' 'er 'ead. The way ah sees 'er trip 'bout like if she's sixteen, ah says to Obediah, 'whenever ah sees 'er comin' ah knocks on wood, an' you do the same, t'aint 'cause you aint never been hit in the 'ead by some crazy nigger you'ze proof 'gainst the wiles of a 'oman.' "

"Malinda!" cried Flora, "I'm surprised at you."

"No, Miss Flora, ah aint surprised at mahself, ah keeps 'sprised at Mrs. Douglas, for a ol' 'oman her age—to be prancin' 'bout, an' wantin' to wear a white satin dress."

At last Flora thought she had a clue to the old lady's wanting a white dress. She probably wanted to show off at Dan's wedding, but when she told Virginia about it, her friend knew nothing of the wedding and showed such evident signs of distress at the mention of it that Flora feared she had committed an indiscretion. No doubt, Theresa, having brooded over her troubles for more than a quarter of a century, had passed the limit of endurance, thought the girl, and the old cook must be right. This pleasant phantasy was

bridging her over from the sane into the insane. She would look after her carefully.

And Theresa showed no signs of resenting Flora's presence but greeted her with the exuberant joy of girlhood whenever she thought it wise to intrude into her room. Malinda at such times was never far off.

All this occupied one week and at the end of the seventh day, a letter came to Captain François, from Donald Douglas, authorizing the young man to announce to the mining town the formation of a syndicate of rich capitalists who intended making the lead mines prove the greatest in the world. The necessary prospecting equipment was being purchased, and in a short time, eight or ten of the Eastern men interested would come down to Bonne Terre and see the operations started.

The Captain was just able to sit in a big, comfortable rocking chair on the porch, but he sent word around and about the village for the people to assemble at the Inn the next morning, for him to read to them the letter just come from New York, announcing the great future ahead of the town. They came,—men, women, and children, —and as they stood in the yard below him, in a

compact body, François made known to them the contents of the letter.

When he concluded the message, deafening shouts and cheering arose in the still air. Bonne Terre awoke from its lethargy, and people went about the rude streets crying loudly the names of the Douglases—the benefactors of the village on the three hills.

On the heels of the excitement, the Douglases made a miniature triumphal entry into Bonne Terre.

The following neat looking invitations were delivered to every home, announcing the "Re-wedding" at Dade's Inn, on Thursday evening next, of Donald Douglas and Theresa Douglas. It was unanimously decided that a ball should be given the same night to celebrate the event in conjunction with the good fortune which had lately come to Bonne Terre through its mining interests. Captain Jean François was asked to give away the bride.

Hence the gay dressing for a weather-stained old Inn.

Once more a crowd typical of the out-of-way district gathered at Dade's home. The last function held in the old rambling building was the dance following the Dade trial, and that was be-

fore the war, when rustic lads and lasses and uncouth hunters and backwoodsmen vied in harmless hilarity. Since then the sword that had killed tens of thousands numbered among its victims many of the young giants of the hills,—old Silas contributing his quota to these sacrifices to patriotism. On the eve of the Douglas ball not many remembered the one which had gone on in the past.

Of those few, François, sitting and musing in the lengthening shadows of the afternoon, revived his impressions of the dance years ago.

At times he had tried to ignore, had fooled himself into believing that treasures can be locked in the heart and left there, to sweeten life unawares; but the vaults of inner man are unlike steel-ribbed strong-boxes that permit rarest gems to lie therein unused. Man is a living, moving, feeling being, and what is within is his master. In spite of his will, François's mind had taken daily invoice of the treasure he stored away, and if not during his waking hours, then at night the chain wheel of dreams had turned out its beauties to glitter and dazzle in mimic episodes of realities.

So, it required on his part no effort to recall the girl who had just donned long skirts and who had fascinated him with her beautiful simplicity,

as she uttered commonplaces peculiar to the hills. Her "you'ns" and "we'uns" sounded so quaint after the lapse of years. Then he thought of their meeting in Richmond and how she had laughed at her former ignorance. It was there that she admitted to him her engagement to Dan Douglas, and the recollection brought him to the realization of the present—she was as far from him now as then when he had locked up the memories of their short acquaintance that meant so much to him. Since then how the store had grown. He still loved Virginia and he knew that in a short while when she would come up and greet him she would outshine the little backwoodsmaid of long ago. She was crowned by the glory of full womanhood now and had at her command all the subtle shades of language to express the thoughts of a highly cultured mind. François felt a numbness about his heart—he must love without hope for she loved another.

Katydids began their chirping in the tree tops. Whippoorwills whistled in the dark gulches, and swallows twittered as they sped in circles above chimney tops and occasionally swooped to the earth. Night approached. Already the first arrivals to the wedding and ball were coming down the road. Silas and Mam joined the Captain,

their wrinkled faces aglow with happy smiles donned to welcome their friends and guests. François's sad mood felt rebuked by their unselfishness, so he replied to Dade's sallies with his accustomed cheerfulness. He was soon helped to his chair in the big white-washed room, and the master and mistress of the Inn met the bridal party.

Promptly at eight o'clock, Donald Douglas and Bud Dade stood before the great fire-place, converted by Virginia and Flora into a cavern of flowers for the occasion, and Theresa and Dan assisted Captain François to stand with them by the side of the "husband bridegroom." "Bawlly" Young, an old-time preacher, very famous in his day, prefaced his simple ceremony with a brief explanation of why the two were being rejoined after three decades of separation. When these appropriate remarks were finished, everyone present was convinced and the hearty applause which exploded by general consent, showed that old suspicions and whispered tales died that instant.

Donald and Theresa, both with hair silvered by the slow but sure running of time, took a step forward and joined hands. Old "Bawlly" reread the ceremony of thirty-five years standing, Captain François pronouncing the words of giving

away the bride used by her brother, long since dead. The wife-bride, in her white satin gown, captivated every man and woman and won their love. Donald, staid and solid in purpose, but genial and jolly, was accorded the full confidence and esteem of the villagers.

The old preacher concluded with the customary:

"What God hath joined
let no man put asunder,"

then he spread out his big palms to heaven and prayed fervently for blessings upon the couple, and especially upon their son Dan.

Since the minister's religion opposed dancing, he went away immediately after the ceremony, followed by the regrets of the young men and women who long after Bonne Terre became a city, remembered "Bawlly" Young and the advice he gave so earnestly.

Again the fiddlers twigged the strings of their violins and played snatches of familiar music while couples were being formed of suitable partners. This time it was Bud who occupied the place by the hearth and called out the figures. François, from his retired seat in a corner of the room studied his face. At the dance before the war, Bud was a rough hill youth, a proud though whipped bully of the fists; now he stood erect, a

man from whose countenance shone discipline and education. But Dade's son was still young and he clapped his hands and stamped his foot roguishly as the violin tackled his favorite tune, and called in an inimitable, resonant voice: "Balance the bride, then fall in all! Balance all!"

The ball had begun.

As on a like occasion years before, Jean François sat in an obscure corner, overcome with ecstacy as he watched Virginia dance. He had envied Dan before, he envied him again although he scolded himself for it the next instant. The tender bud of a woman just beginning to unfold at the time of the former dance now he saw a completed flower, surpassingly lovely. He spent the evening alternately reveling in his love and sobering before its impossibility, conquering it was beyond his strength for he loved her with an uncontrollable, all-consuming love.

"Why not assert yourself?" it whispered. "Have you not the same right to happiness as your rival?"

"No," he whispered to himself, "not with the shadow of mystery darkening my name."

Thus in retrospection and rejoicing, and with the commingling of the remnants of the old-fashioned past with the new life of a beginning epoch,

the festivities of the night went on until another day tiptoed over the Eastern ridges. Laughing and shouting good-humored banter, the company separated and disappeared on the roads and paths, carrying home a conviction that an edict had been issued commanding a change of front to right-about-face in the new Bonne Terre.

CHAPTER XXV.

A CONFESSION.

Upon discovering that Captain François had parted with title to his lands, Bud Dade held a conference with Flora and both decided there could be nothing amiss in the transaction since there was plain record thereof. "Moreover," added Bud, "by what right can we, unauthorized friends, pry into his private business? François cannot be ignorant of his status, and does not require us to look after his interests."

"In one way you are right, but can't you see that his—devotion to Virginia might make him overlook them?" insisted Flora.

Bud remained silent for a minute. He was pondering over Flora's hesitation and the word she used to express what he considered simply friendship on François's part.

Flora had lived true to her high resolve to forget herself in her love for the Captain, but there seemed to be some compensation, some secret satisfaction if she could be at all instrumental in

bringing about his happiness with Virginia as his wife. That the latter had no designs whatever on his affections made it easy for Flora, besides, she loved her friend sincerely.

So, when Bud whistled softly, a questioning look in his eyes, Flora told him that she was certain the Captain loved Virginia, but with a hopeless love because of her affection for Dan.

"But, certainly the Captain must know there is not much ardor in their love, else how account for an engagement of such long standing? He has always seemed to me to hold back from Virginia."

"Of course, he would; that's because he loves her in the genuine old-fashioned way. I think he would die before letting Virginia know. He would think himself dishonored for ever."

After a moment's reflection Flora asked:

"But why did you speak so confidently just now? Do you really believe there has ceased to be earnestness on Dan's part. I know that Virginia is very serious and loves him as much as ever."

"Dan would not mention it to me, but it is quite plain. One can usually tell what is false and what is true in matters of love. I'm as sure as you, however, that Virginia has more than kept her part of the bargain."

"Quite. You have no idea how joyous she was

before Dan went to New York. She told me of plans to be carried out after the mines proved a success. No, I believe she said the wedding would take place as soon as the necessary capital was secured. I can't help thinking that those terrible hints of Theresa's disturbed her faith in Dan. Still, as you say, after the recent event who can doubt their exaggeration? Dan seems respectful not to say affectionate, towards his mother, but *I* think him very cold and, Bud, I don't care if I do say it without being able to prove my words, I haven't the slightest use for him. I feel that he isn't to be trusted. No, you cannot change my opinion of him. I've tried hard to be fair to him but it's no use, and it makes me angry to see Captain François, sitting back and letting him have Virginia—and his lands."

Flora stopped just long enough to take a deep breath. Bud arose from the log on which they sat at the edge of the forest and looked about for something to whittle.

"Well, Dan's back now, the Syndicate's been formed, all the necessary capital is backing the enterprise and yet there is no talk of wedding. I thought his father's rewedding an opportunity and I quizzed Virginia about it but there was nothing doing. Bud, I think you must be right. And,

Bud," she repeated solemnly, "I think it is your duty to speak to Captain François. Now might be his chance."

"I told you, Flora, that I'm not much for interfering in other people's business. If Virginia loves Dan this is something over which we have no control."

"Bud, won't you speak to the Captain?"

"No."

"But you admit you don't think Dan will ever marry Virginia?"

"Yes, I have my doubts."

"Well, you may do what you think right, but I'm not going to let Virginia be the dupe of such a man. Bud, if you won't help me, I'll ask—let me see whom shall I ask?"

Bud came nearer.

"I'm willing to help you, Flora, but I've never cultivated a taste for matchmaking."

"You won't call it that, Bud, or I'll wash my hands forever of—you," she added smiling, quick to note some weakening in his attitude. "But if this dandy—that's all he is—"

"He's a fine business man, Flora."

"That might be all right for men, but it does not make a woman happy to have a husband who is only a fine business man. He must be some-

thing besides—when he gets home. If, as I said, this dandy will not or cannot marry Virginia because he does not have the proper sense of her worth, it is our duty, when we know that a man like Captain François loves her, to urge him on in some way. Look here, if I were a big, strong man like you, I'd know just what to do, I'd talk to Dan Douglas himself."

Bud laughed at her ardor.

"Well, at any rate, I'd speak to Captain François."

"What good would that do? you admit yourself that he has such a nice sense of honor that he would never step before Dan."

"Bud, I don't know what to tell you to do, but do something. I can't manage Virginia and Dan both."

"The most I can do, is to think it over, since you are determined."

"That isn't much but it might turn out to be something," said Flora brightening. If once started he would go on to the end.

If anyone rushed at Bud and tried to excite him into action it was all a mistake. He worked best at low pressure. Flora knew this and tried to curb her excitability. They walked about for an-

other half hour, and she did not again mention the subject she had at heart.

On arriving at the street crossing near the Bardsdell home Virginia ran after her and begged them both to come in a while. Bud excused himself, Flora, after a little coaxing, accepted the invitation.

She had meant to go to Virginia's any way that Sunday afternoon, but it served well to have her insist.

"Really, Virginia," she pleaded, "I must go home first, Mamma may need me. Indeed, I have a message for her."

"You may do that if you will, your mother is at our house."

"Oh, all right then."

The message was forgotten as they started across the lawn to the arbor.

They took their accustomed seats on the bench, and for a while chatted aimlessly. Virginia seemed depressed. Flora tacked sail and threw a little there to windward but it was useless, the anchor was down. But the haphazard way in which the conversation ran, so different from their usual bright way of dealing with some question, did not indicate necessarily mental lethargy, instead it was the result of preoccupation on both sides.

Old Silas passed the gate and signalled to the girls, but receiving no response, he trudged on muttering to himself wise sayings as was his custom. This time no one being within earshot, he let his wisdom run on unabated.

Said he:

"Them sure is the likeliest gals we've ever had in these here parts. I haint sayin' though which one I'd take if I was on the fly again. Humph! 't would be hard pickin' out."

He stood still a few seconds then he kicked out a rock from the road. He was still musing:

"Strange I used to think them so much alike. But they haint." He turned around and looked in the direction of the Bardsdell garden.

"Now, there's Virgie,—prettier 'n a statoo in one them museums I seen once in St. Louis, 'cause her cheeks an' lips is just as red as any man could like, I haint sayin' nothin' of her plumpness and figger, that I said is like a beautiful statoo's an' better yet 'cause them statoos always gives me the shivers. Her eyes, bejabers, that's where she skins them statoos again, they melts into yours and makes you feel like a saint, that is, like being one. It's dolgarned funny how a fellow wants to be good when the right kin' of a gal turns her blinkers into his very soul. Then Virgie's hair,

was I forgettin' that! I seen the time when I'd be in glory tangling my fingers in such. No, I never seen blacker, glossier curly hair in this world, an' no one ever seen prettier in the nex', or more of it nuther."

He cleared his throat with an "Ahem!"

"After that you'd nat'rally think Flora haint in it, but that's where you're mistaken. She's just 'bout Virginia's size but you forgits 'bout Virgie's black eyes when she turns those blue orbs on you. She's prettier 'n a June apple on a cake stand! Her face roun' an' plump, with cheeks an' lips as bright as said apple, an' when you sees those dark fringe of eye-lashes sweepin' on her cheeks you 'spects her to look at you through black eyes. But, my! no! They's as blue as the sky on a June day, with the same summer thunder an' lightin' running through them when she's angry. I've seen that already, 'deed I have. But after the storm how they brightens up, I've seen that, too.

"I used to think Virgie a spit-fire, but 't was afore I knew Flora. It's sort of worn outern Virgie, I wonder why? I always think a little spirit good in a woman. She's mighty good an' honest though, but so is Flora. I wonder after

all which out 'n the two I'd picked out—if I was on the fly?"

For the last minute, Silas had been searching all his pockets for a chew of tobacco. Finding the bit of twist in the lining of his coat, he ripped the seam with his pocket knife and succeeded in extricating it. He bit off a mouthful and put the remaining piece carefully away in another pocket, then kept on his way which was to his "General Store." His last exclamation as he thought of the girls was:

"By gosh! what wives they'll make! Why haint Bud and the Captain got their eyes skinned like me!"

Back on the rustic seat, Virginia had raised anchor and was preparing Flora for something that was not at all clear to her, though Flora, on the alert, was endeavoring to encourage her friend by lending sympathetic ears, wondering all the time for what point she was heading.

"Flora, do you remember before Dan went away," she paused long enough for Flora to put in "Yes?"

"Before Dan went away to New York, I sat here with you and told you of our plans?"

"Yes, dear."

"We have never spoken of them since, have we?"

"No, Virginia."

"For many reasons known to us both—that is some of them." She heaved a deep sigh and continued:

"Flora, it was hard for me to hear you speak of Dan's neglect of me. Had anyone else ever mentioned it to you?"

Flora did not answer.

"Well, it does not matter, but at the time you forced me to own that it was a source of poignant disappointment to me. But everything seemed to go on well for a short time until we witnessed his harsh treatment of his mother, not to say his cruel treatment."

"Well, that has been righted, Virgie, and whatever Dan's and his father's faults towards Mrs. Douglas, they have atoned nobly for them. They deserve credit for that much."

"Yes, Flora, but I see you are saying that to keep from hurting my feelings. Dan should never have forgotten that the poor frail woman who spoke so pitifully was his mother. The fact that he showed rudeness to a woman, whoever she was, goes to prove that he might do so again."

"You're right, Virgie, I was afraid to wound

your feeling now that everything is going on so beautifully for you. But since you mentioned it, I believe Dan acted horribly. Can you imagine Bud or Captain François speaking so to their mother?"

"No, I could not help contrasting, then and there, Captain François's tender recollections of his childhood and his father, who was so unnecessarily harsh with him, and Dan's—Oh! you do not know how I suffered from the shame of it all!"

After a short pause Virginia continued:

"However, I loved Dan truly, and tried hard to find some excuse for his conduct. I appealed to him the night he was leaving for New York. But it is not to speak of that, I am confiding in you."

Flora's eyes opened wider and wider with Virginia's every remark.

"Flora, you saw me dance with Dan the other night, but did you notice how silent he was? Do you know that since his return he was over to see me but twice—and stayed but a few minutes each time, always pleading business? Yesterday he met me by accident and he proposed we be married on Thursday next. I told him I would require time to think it over. This did not seem to nettle him at all, and he went away perfectly satisfied."

"You want to tell me you've made up your mind? I have no right to interfere further with you, Virgie."

"Nothing anyone could say would cause me to change my decision. My mind is made up."

"And that means?"

"That I cannot marry him."

"Virginia!" and Flora's arms were about her friend.

"No, his coldness and other things about him, that I cannot explain, everything have finally succeeded in killing my love for him."

"Oh, how unhappy you must feel."

"Not at all, I have no regrets, except to be humiliated in admitting to you that I have been a fool all these years. And now I see that all along my friends—"

"Hush, Virgie, your friends are only too happy that your engagement is broken off in time."

"I asked you a while ago, Flora, if anyone had ever made remarks about Dan's indifference to me. I should be so pained and still I want to know. Has—Captain François ever spoken of it?"

"Never."

The relief the prompt answer brought to Virginia's mind and heart was so apparent in her

eyes that Flora's next question was out before she could recall it:

"Why did you ask that?"

The tell-tale blush on Virginia's face was equivalent to a confession that she valued the Captain's regard above all others. She bit her lips but tears welled in her eyes and she covered her face with her hands.

"Virgie, why should you be ashamed to own up when Captain François worships the ground you walk on? I have seen in his eyes the same light that lit up yours when you spoke his name just now."

"Flora, I cannot help it. I never knew it at the time, but I have been loving the Captain ever since his relapse and I know now, by the way I love him that I never loved Dan Douglas. It is difficult to confess this truth to you, Flora. I once thought you—loved—Captain François."

"It is strange, Virgie, but I, too, have a confession to make: I loved Captain François until his relapse."

Virginia nestled up closely to her friend and looked straight into her eyes.

"Is that the gospel truth?"

"Yes."

"And what brought about the change—so suddenly?"

"I discovered he would never love me, because—"

"Because?"

"He loves you."

"And you can still be happy, Flora?"

"I expect to be loved some day by someone meant for me. It was hard to bring myself to this point but I finally succeeded and now my dearest wish is that he might win you—for his wife."

"Flora! but I do not expect him to love me. I suppose you think me very bold. Ever since I found out my mistake I've been censuring myself for loving the Captain while technically engaged to another."

"I'm glad you used the word technically for it expresses the situation exactly; it was the most hollow, soulless engagement I ever heard of, or read of." The last phrase was put in as an afterthought.

"Please understand me, Flora. I tell you I love Captain François. I meant to keep it secret, for he has never given me the least hint of a cause for my feelings, but somehow I could not hide it from you. Oh! I would die before I'd let him suspect it."

"Why?"

"I should believe that I had shown him my heart and that out of pity to me he—might propose."

"You do the Captain an injustice. He is incapable of deceiving anyone."

"Ah yes; I know, but he might deceive himself, then indeed I should be unhappy."

"But have I not told you that he loves you?"

"Oh, Flora! how can I allow you to speak thus when you admit that—?"

Tears and laughter mingled like rain and sunshine in April, and the friends finally spoke of something else, as Virginia declared herself ready at any time to sacrifice her feelings and love for her friend.

"That's for the Captain to decide," said Flora.

"I hope that won't be for some time—yet," whispered Virgie in her friend's ear.

"Let's talk business. This morning, I sent Dan a note, giving my reasons for breaking our engagement—for refusing to marry him—all except the one relating to his mother. Here is his reply."

She drew out of her pocket a single sheet of paper.

It read:

"I simply made my proposition to secure my release. A word of advice: do not consider a certain pauper. You are worthy of a home.

"D. D."

"Whom do you suppose he means?"

"A pauper!" repeated Flora, slowly scanning the lines. "He means François, Captain François."

"But he isn't a pauper. He owns these lands."

"Nevertheless, that's who he means," said Flora firmly.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A BARRIER.

Bonne Terre was soon astir with strange men and the excitement attendant upon the development work in progress. Great things were expected to result from the opening up of the strata far below. The few inhabitants and even men from afar came to see. Some said it was a thing unfounded—lead hundreds of feet below surface. In Missouri, at least, lead could be secured only in surface pockets. But the majority believed that if lead existed on the surface, it might be far more abundant underneath where no man was able to see and measure.

The buzz and bustle grew while all else was forgotten.

Again Captain François recuperated but this time he used care to exercise reasonably until his wounds were quite healed. By and by he, too, joined the throngs that looked on from morning to night, hoping that each sounding would open up great beds of ore. After a time he became as

strong as ever. He believed in the mines and watched feverishly every foot of hoistings.

While all this hubbub occupied everybody, François, though no less enthusiastic than other people who might own adjacent lands, meditated more upon the promptings of his inner emotions, and seemed to be more concerned with them than with the possession of lands and houses. Probably it could be said, and in just verity, that François was not a keen business man. It was not because of lack of energy and ambition, but simply because to all appearance, he lacked the burning lead for business prowess which forces men to go on from one commercial achievement to another. Perhaps it was the strict law of heredity that made him more inclined to martial tendencies than the ordinary, in a way, sordid routine for gain. Although feverishly interested in the future of the mines, he was lax in his own interests to the extent of never having inquired after his titles or troubled about the payment of taxes. He acquiesced in the mining company's seeing about these things. Consequently, it was in harmony with his makeup to find himself absorbed in the beautiful rather than the practical, and to lose himself in sentimental musings when others counted an increase in land values.

In such men as Captain François there is a highly developed sense of honor, and often an abnormal sense, which leads them into bypaths totally unknown to the plain every day business men who move as centers of their own little worlds.

It is, therefore, not surprising that when Bonne Terre bestirred itself in sundry undertakings, the Captain fell to thinking of affairs of the heart and wondered whether it would be honorable or not to tell Virginia of his feelings towards her, in view of her lukewarm engagement to Dan Douglas. A casual remark from Bud Dade had led François to believe that the engagement was broken off, but as Virginia, since the episode in the woods, never mentioned Dan's name, François felt a delicacy about speaking to her of her lover at all, although he was besides himself with hope.

But what to François was the great bar which his acute sense of honor could not surmount was the cloud that rested on his father's fair name. While he believed with his whole soul in his father's integrity, he could not suppress public opinion, though founded on silly rumors. Should he ever speak to Virginia, he must offer her the untarnished name his father once bore. In addition to the mystery which had at all times hung over Paul François on account of his secluded

mode of living, there was now the rumor that he appeared on his grave as if something disturbed the repose of his soul. Virginia was too level-headed to give credence to every idle tale she might hear, of that François was certain, but still what might she not think when creditable evidence declared that a man—it mattered not who—had been seen on the double grave, and vanished either in space or into the ground? True or false, that was the report, and a certain portion of the inhabitants believed the tale. Only a very few were original inhabitants who had known Paul and François personally. They were among those who had given their solemn word not to speak of their dead friends, but what promise could hold good in the face of such apparitions? So, François declared to himself that until he could explain away the mystery, he must not confess his love to Virginia.

It had seemed to François, when after an absence of ten years he returned to Bonne Terre and found his father and mother gone from him, that after hearing, at Dade's Inn, Donald Douglas's story on that ever memorable night, it would be an easy task to get from the old man another and clearer version of the tale which, from certain coinciding points appeared to concern his father.

But now, after years of acquaintance with the elder Douglas, he failed altogether in his purpose. In Dan Douglas, he could read deceit to confirm the hints of treachery given him at different times, first by Basil, then later by Theresa, although he had never been able to convince himself that it was so. Here, again he was handicapped by the high sense of honor which forbade him think evil of his rival, thereby giving him the benefits of all doubts. But Donald Douglas had ever after that one break in his armor of genial stolidity been a living impersonation of respectability and dignity which François never had the courage to assail. As for Theresa, while there was no doubt that she held some mysterious connection with his father's past, her violent liking for François had forced him away from her. It was only after battling with himself that he consented to give her away at the rewedding. There, once more, was evidence of the stratum of innate chivalry which ran through his nature, for it required great self-will for him to control his aversion. He had never referred to her, not even to his old friend, Uncle Si. Her age and feebleness defended her against both men.

Still, Captain François loved Virginia so ardently that he could not forego her company. Before his illness he was able to exercise some restraint

on himself, but now that seeing her daily had become a habit he did not realize the danger that lay therein until too late, and now the new hope that lighted the future, however distant, lured him onward in the same course. After he was sufficiently recovered to walk to her home and Flora's he spent half of his time wandering about the neighborhood with the girls, then they took to longer walks over and about the surrounding hills. They were like happy children, evincing no shyness, and yet no familiarity. No one in the town seemed to comment on this stranger friendship which many might have criticized. The fact is that both girls stood too high in the community for anyone to indulge in incorrect thoughts of their conduct. François's unfortunate accident had gained him immunity from further gossip and many hearts had softened towards him.

Flora who had loved François, and still loved him in a way, consigned him cheerfully to her bosom friend. Virginia,—was it because the Captain still ignored himself loved by the woman he worshipped?—was now the chief object of Flora's solicitude. To advance her cause she schemed night and day.

Being ignorant of the Captain's complications of the case, Flora after giving him every oppor-

tunity to talk to Virginia was surprised to find them neglected. She would gladly have spoken to him of the broken engagement, but Virginia had made her vow secrecy, so she trusted to chance to enlighten the Captain.

While Jean François was watching the development of the mines, Bud Dade, with a full measure of American business acumen surging through his veins, threw his lot in with the new Syndicate. His days were spent in driving the drill, and later on, in superintending the entire development work in one section. But of evenings, since there was nowhere else to go, and especially as no more congenial associates were to be found anywhere, he accompanied the Captain to Mrs. Bardsdell's or Mrs. Birsch's, and the four friends passed the time either on the lawn under starlit skies, or walked across the commons, very often far out on the hills.

On one of these pleasurable excursions, an unfortunate experience put farther away from François than even he had thought possible, all intention of declaring his love to Virginia.

One evening after dinner, the friendly quartet wandered away from the village, and as it had been a sultry day, they climbed to the summit of Blue Hill to catch a whiff of cooler breezes. The

night was favored with quietude and a profligate flood of soft light which fell from a full moon cast a gentle radiance over the scenery. Hour after hour they walked, laughing and talking together while the sky became overcast with great, rolling white clouds and just a suspicion of a gathering rain bank in the west. Now and again the broad grin of the moon was eclipsed by a flying, snowlike puff, and, although the young people were not very far from home, the outdoor revelers started to return.

Bud and Flora volunteered to lead the way—because Bud said it was a new path, as if any path or trail could be new to François. But such companionships take passing delight in whims, and the Captain and Virginia smilingly acquiesced. Naturally some space intervened in the marching line, augmented again and again by the slower pace François was forced to maintain on account of his not too robust condition. Soon the gap of convention widened until the buzz of voices ahead could scarcely be discernible to François and Virginia so they walked on unconcerned through the open woods totally oblivious of the "new path" they were supposed to follow.

As if by magic, a dark mist sprawled across the heavens, plunging the Captain and his companion

into darkness with the rest of the world. They were in no way alarmed, indeed there was no occasion for fear, as either could have found his way back to the house blindfolded. However, Bud sent up a loud whistle to which François replied, and he urged Virginia forward to catch up with their friends, but in order to do so they strayed into briar thickets. By and by they found themselves under the spreading oak Paul François loved so well.

The Captain remarked:

"Do you know that since Father left me a message about this tree, it seems to be a link between my dead parents and me. Dad wished me to protect it and always remember his fondness for it."

"We must come here oftener," said Virgina, "for since you've mentioned it there seems to be a peculiar charm about this venerable oak."

François was touched by the delicacy of her remark, and paused a few seconds to glance up at the strong limbs that supported a network of interlacing twigs and patches of foliage.

Just then a peal of thunder, followed by a series of flashes of lightning rent the heavy stillness of the air and lighted up every nook about. The girl and the man found themselves looking straight

at the grim old stone chimney that stood guard over the grave of Paul and Helen François, and as they looked suddenly a stooped form appeared in the underbrush nearby and moved stealthily to the wall about the tomb. It strided over, and, for a moment, stood on the mound over the grave. There followed a brief space of complete darkness, then a guttural boom of thunder caused Virginia to clutch François's arm and she shuddered. The lightning flashed again shortly, and although less than a half minute had elapsed between the previous flash and the last, the form on the tomb was no longer to be seen.

François was still with amazement,—only for a few seconds. He pushed Virginia from him and made a rush forward. But Virginia ran after him and pulled him by the arm.

"After all, François, it must be true!" she cried, "it must be—your father!" She was trembling like a leaf. "Come, let's hurry away," she pleaded.

The rest of the way home was a panic-stricken flight. François could barely keep up with Virginia.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE REVELATION.

JEAN FRANÇOIS was fast learning that success cannot be attained without painful effort. Though patient in suffering; in the face of disappointment fighting on because he saw ahead an all-powerful hand ready to be grasped by earnest exertion, still, at times, it seemed to him that his trials in Bonne Terre reached the extreme limit of his endurance. From childhood, nothing in his native hills turned to his good, so he had left, but the call of the backwoods brought him back, and now, another, more powerful yet, beckoned him onward. What greed and even ordinary ambition failed to accomplish was to be wrought through a different agency, considered infallible,—love.

After standing with Virginia, and seeing the man of mystery—the spirit—emerge from the shadows and stand on the grave, he accompanied Virginia home and bade her good-night in a listless, abstracted way. He was too preoccupied to discuss the experience with his companion, who,

moreover, was too excited to look at the occurrence from a reasonable point of view. So, he had finally seen the specter that alarmed the neighborhood. Since he did not believe it was a spirit then it was a man. In François's opinion that was a great point gained. He could easily understand that the majority of the people about thought it a spirit on account of the suddenness of its disappearance, and very willingly forgave Virginia for thinking likewise, fully convinced as he was that the next day she would be ready to abjure her theory of a ghost and most probably feel ashamed of having entertained the idea for a minute. But whatever the conclusion she reached, François was quite decided that he would not ask her to remain silent on the subject. His pride forbade him. The only real effect François's trials had upon him was that,—perhaps it resulted from the nature of his trials—he became extremely sensitive where he was concerned and always saw a point of honor involved. He forgave Virginia, but he felt hurt.

Under the circumstances, as he could not possibly explain to her the appearance nor the disappearance, François determined that he would discontinue his visits at Virginia's home until he solved the mystery.

This time he did not go to Basil.

Brooding over the matter that vexed and worried him made him silent and unsociable. Flora and Bud wondered and feared some misunderstanding must have arisen between him and Virginia since he stopped calling on her. Virginia, on her side, was strangely quiet and kept out of reach of her chum.

François came to the conclusion that one more disastrous experience might render his residence in Bonne Terre intolerable. Not because he wanted to leave, on the contrary, he was more anxious than ever to remain. Many a night found him in the vicinity of the great oak, puzzling over the mystery and hoping for a recurrence of what had happened, with him the stole witness. But if it was going to prove an everlasting source of torment to him and his friends, what then?

In the midst of his meditations following several days of close watching in the small hours of the night, Dan Douglas who of late awaited an opportunity of speaking with François came up to him one morning and proposed a little hunt. The Captain was more than surprised, as he knew by intuition that Dan cared as little for him as possible, but a man in mental misery often chooses strange companions. François accepted, and the two shouldered rifles and went off up the hollow.

When a short distance from the Inn, Dan said:

"I brought plenty of ammunition to last some time and I have blankets. It's early in the season but I feel like having a couple days' rest. I hope you're of the same mind."

Beyond assenting, François did not speak. He longed for the hills and kept his gaze fastened on them.

On they went until the ridge of Dry Bones lifted them above the village, where they could see two dozen men at work about the mines. The chug-chug of the drills sent up a series of confused sounds with twice repeated echoes. Dan turned around and reminded François that possibly the steel bits were eating into one of the greatest beds of wealth yet found in the world.

"But I'm glad to get away. No one knows I'm off with you, Captain, unless you told old Dade. Did you?"

"He saw me pass out with my rifle, but asked no questions!"

"Well, I've worked hard enough to take a rest. I tell you, I had a time to get those Easterners to put up the money. I came near giving up a time or two, but I held on and succeeded. Now that the last dollar is up, and Dad and Birsch have the spending of it I wash my hands of the business, in

a way. Bud Dade knows better than any man at work there how to make every stroke of his hammer count. I'm quite willing to give others full swing."

François stroked his rifle reflectively as they rested a while.

"Yes," said he, "you've done a great work and deserve credit and I suppose a rest also. I'm willing to go. All day yesterday I fought the call of the hills, so when you proposed going I was the man you were looking for." He looked at his companion and wondered: "Perhaps he will speak of—Virginia." Then his brows contracted: "I'd rather not, he might speak carelessly in which case —but what could he say of her? No, I should never think of asking him if it was she broke off the engagement."

"Well, suppose we cross the river and make for Primrose Creek. That's a cracking good spot for shooting, and in case we kill several deer, it will be easy to get them brought in by the woodmen in the valleys."

"That suits me. I haven't been that way since before the war, and excepting Shannon County, we shall see there the finest scenery in Missouri."

"I don't care a rap for such things as scenery. I hear you're always on the lookout for it."

"I am. Scenery rests the mind."

After all the Captain was drawn into conversation.

"I never think of it," said Dan.

"Have you been over to Birsch Town way in recent years?"

"No, Captain. I haven't been there since Dad and I first came to this part of the world. Do you remember hearing we got lost in those hills five days?"

"It's a fine place to get lost in. I wish I could find one where that might happen to me, and where there wouldn't be anyone to put me straight again—for some time."

"Hadn't you better not travel too much the first day, or are you quite strong again? I heard Uncle Si say Doctor Keith warned you against those ugly wounds in your chest."

François looked at Dan surprised to hear him speak so. Was there after all a kinder streak running through him than he gave him credit for? But the remembrance of Dan's cruelty to his mother sent a suspicion of distrust through his mind. He did not answer for a while. Then hating to appear churlish he replied:

"I shall look out for myself. On that account

I suggest that we take the creek bottom after we pass yonder backbone."

"Anything for your comfort, Captain," said Dan in a patronizing voice highly distasteful to François. This time he let the conversation drop.

Towards night the hunters entered Primrose Gorge, seven miles due north of Bonne Terre. They were not particularly tired but had exercised sufficiently while sauntering along through the woods to beget good appetites. The thing uppermost in the minds of both men was to light a fire for the night.

A little reconnoitering led them to discover a spring of crystal water gushing from under an overhanging cliff, and there they decided to camp. A fire lighted against the stone wall provided warmth with a minimum of smoke. A half dozen squirrels, bagged en route, were barbecued over the flames, and a little ash cake made by mixing a small quantity of cornmeal with water and cooking it in the hot ashes. That quite sufficed to satisfy their hunger.

This done and the meal over, the two men filled their pipes and stretched themselves out by the bed of live coals.

Whatever François's private opinion of Dan, and he always combatted his feelings towards

Donald Douglas's son and Virginia's *fiancé,* there had never been a day when the two men were on such bad terms that they did not speak to each other. So, on this occasion, François was prepared to make the best of his company.

Evil men need a good man's counsel. Dan's purpose included more than a peaceful hunt.

So, while they lay by the fire, Dan related events of his stay in New York and went on to speak of the reconciliation between his father and mother. But of that he spoke reservedly. The main topic of conversation was life in the great metropolis, and his description and comments threw many interesting side-lights on his character which held the Captain's attention. The latter spoke mostly in monosyllables, just enough to encourage his companion.

While the hunters refreshed themselves thus, neither of them saw a third man raise his eyes above a log just opposite Dan Douglas. He seemed fascinated by the study of Dan's features as he related to François his experience in New York. This man had a wiry, short gray beard, streaked down the chin from each corner of the mouth by oozing streams of tobacco juice. He wore a slouch hat, the entire front brim pinned to the crown with a wooden splint. His jaw was

broad and squared out his chin hippopotamus fashion. But despite the savagery stamped on his features, there were some redeeming, or at least, palliating characteristics about them that would make the observer look at the man a second time to make sure that he had not been judged too harshly. This last scrutiny revealed honesty and steadfastness of purpose—though of the bull-dog sort—that would continue unyielding until complete success was attained.

Dan and François were not conscious of being followed about for more than an hour before they stopped to camp. From tree to tree and rock to rock, this apparent monstrosity of a man slided about, crouching and hiding, that he might get a look at the men's faces. Then a sullen look darkened his eyes as they fixed themselves on Dan, as he kept step with the hunters whose faces were at times hidden by the thick hazel brush and the undergrowth along the trail. From his outpost by the log the man could examine at his leisure. An expression of doubt replaced the sullenness in his eyes, then after observing his clean shaven face for a few minutes longer, Zach Keen, the hippopotamus-faced man shook his head and slunk away.

He climbed the steep hill wearily and looked in the direction of the column of smoke that rose

straight up from a big, squatting chimney. He could see the rough shingles of the roof, painted red, peeping through interstices in the thick foliage of the surrounding trees. A dark look again clouded his eyes which a minute before, though tired, shone clear gray—they gave the key-note to the man's character. He took off his coat, made it into a bundle which he used for a pillow as he lay at full length on the ground. Whenever the present mood came over Zack Keen it always presaged the review of the cause and effects which had brought him into the wilderness of the hills as he called the country about—he was a man of the plains and closer settlements. A man had abused his hospitality, a man unknown to him, who had come in his absence, and because of this unknown man though none of his family were at fault, Zack Keen had seen fit to abandon a comfortable home in the South, swearing that he would never return to it until he found the scoundrel who had worked mischief in his household. It would be difficult to guess precisely the nature of the evil done without its being fully explained by an unprejudiced party, for Zack Keen's touchy conception of family honor often drove him to great lengths. This time he chose to work out the troublesome chapter of his home life in his

own peculiar way, wife, daughter, and two sons powerless to hinder him. They had followed him to the hills, because it was his opinion that he would find the transgressor somewhere about De Soto.

Late that night, Keen returned home. He ate his supper in silence.

Once the meal was over, he called his daughter to him and said:

"Katie, describe him again. Make me see his face as you saw it." Then with a scowl he added: "Not as it was but the way is must look now. Think hard."

Katie stole a glance at her mother.

"She already told you, Zack. Don't torment her."

"Make me see his face, Katie."

There was no evading. Only once before had he made that request, and it was when he thought he had found his man. Mrs. Keen knew there must be something new, and so did the boys who sat near the table cleaning their guns. All the family was obsessed with the idea of finding the rascal who had been the cause of their leaving their home. Only Katie was listless.

"What's the use, Father?" Her large blue eyes gazed at space.

"Do as your father wishes, Katie," insisted her mother.

"I shall, Father, if you promise me, that when you find him you'll bring him here—to me. I tell you there's some mistake. He must be dead. I know you'll not find him, what's the use?" And tears filled her eyes.

Zack Keen arose and placing his big, horny hands on the girl's shoulders forced her back to the wall.

"Will you tell me?" he thundered.

Katie went over the description, shuddering at each item that seemed to coincide with whatever notion her father had in his mind.

"Tall, but not so tall as Bob, more like Jim, only his shoulders are broad and he holds himself like a general. He is handsome, Father, oh! so handsome. His eyes are blue, his mustache black turning to reddish brown at the tips. His hair is dark and wavy, and his skin is very fine though sunburned a little as a man's should be."

"A man!" growled her father.

"And does he walk with a springy step?"

"Yes; but how do you know that?"

"And he has a glib tongue?"

"Y—es; I think so."

Zack Keen turned to his wife.

"Did she make you see him as you saw him—then?"

The mother said the description was correct.

"Promise me, Father," pleaded Katie.

But Keen made no promise. He meant to do as he liked—no more and no less.

"Jim, Bob, call me at four in the morning. And be ready to go with me. That's right, shine up your guns inside and out."

This command electrified the boys, but Keen would not stand for any excitement. He retired to the porch and as he puffed away at his pipe he recalled the face of the man he saw from above the log. It was framed in dark wavy hair but—.

He stopped there.

Katie crept up to her small room under the roof and in the middle of her preparations for the night she stopped and threw herself on her knees with her head resting on the bed. She remained thus all night, praying for the unknown man pursued by her father's vengeance. Would that she might have forgotten his face as he seemed to have forgotten hers.

"Dear God, I know he's dead!" she sobbed over and again, but she had misgivings and trembled lest her father might succeed this time. If only

he had promised her what she asked. She did not like the look in his eyes.

Along in the morning, before daybreak, Captain François was awakened by the popping of a dry stick down on the river. He sat up and listened. Evidently some animal was picking its way through the thicket. "It must be a deer," he thought. He shook Dan and told him to get up and be on the lookout, but Dan turned over on his side and said:

"I told you I want a rest. Let me sleep. The day's long enough for hunting."

François slipped on his boots, took his rifle, and went off to hunt the disturber of his dreams.

But there was nothing to be seen. All he got for his pains was a wetting from the dew on the bushes as he struggled through, so after a half hour's search, he made his way back to the dying embers of their fire.

He walked up quietly to avoid awakening Dan, and as he reached him he started at the sight of a big, burly man half standing, half crouching over the sleeper, a long knife held above him. Two younger men stood in the background with shouldered rifles. François was sure the man with the knife meant to strike. He did not hesitate but fired at once, bringing the big fellow down in a

heap. The men standing back took to their heels.

At the sound of the shot the terrified Dan sprang up and ran to François's side.

The man who was no other than our new acquaintance Keen, groaned loudly and François spoke to Dan who at the sound of the man's voice was preparing to run away.

"Stay here and help me. He is helpless as you can see. The man must be out of his mind."

Zack looked at François angrily in spite of his sufferings which must have been very acute; although not wounded mortally there was no doubt that he must be in terrible pain. François had not intended to hurt him too badly and succeeded in just making him helpless,—both arms were broken. Keen's surprise had been so great that he had given himself up for dead, he thought himself fatally wounded.

"Call my sons," he gasped.

"What do you mean? Why would you have killed him?" asked François pointing to Dan.

"I did not mean to kill him. My sons and I came to capture him, and—you, too, if need be," and the gray eyes glowered under his shaggy eyebrows.

"What do you call those sons of yours?" asked

François. "Call them yourself, and call them quickly." He covered Keen with his gun.

Keen called loudly, assuring Jim and Bob that no harm would befall them and to come to his help.

The young men were not far off, and but for the fact that François had kept his gun aimed at Keen most of the time, either he or Dan would have been fired at.

They approached.

"Drop your guns," called François, "and attend to your father's wounds. They are not serious. I'm sorry, in a way, but there was no alternative left me. I had to fire and quickly, too."

The young men stood stock still.

"Why don't you do something?" urged François, "take something, here take my shirt and bind his arms." He made a movement to divest himself of the garment in question when one of the boys forestalled him.

"All right," said François, "where do you live?"

"A half mile over the hill," answered Jim.

"Now, I want to know what's this all about. Why did your father sneak thus upon us—upon my companion?"

Keen replied:

"As a Southern gentleman, I give you my word

that neither of you will be harmed. I'm your captive and I'm wounded, but if you and that *man* will come with me to my house you will understand. Sons, I want you to give this gentleman your word that you will not play foul with him and the *other one* neither."

Jim and Bob held up their right hand.

"You can do what you like," said Dan to François, "but I'm not going. It is out of the question."

François turned on his fellow huntsman:

"Dan Douglas, gather up the blankets while I help these boys. We go to this man's house. I'm going to sift this matter through."

Dan did not move.

"You'll do as I say," and François spoke angrily. "Why do you stand there trembling like a wet dog? Get ready, quick. Put on your boots."

Instead of losing his temper at François's commands he remonstrated weakly:

"Do you think I'm going to walk into their trap—after he tried to kill me? You're losing your head, François."

"Suit yourself, then. I'm going, but you turn back at the risk of your life. François addressed himself to Keen:

"Although I've promised to accompany you to

your house I must confess that I think this a most extraordinary proceeding."

"Wait until you hear my story—at the house," said Keen between groans. "But this man," pointing to Dan, "must come."

"We will both accompany you," replied François.

"But if he gets away—"

"I'll shoot him if he tries."

Dan looked fiercely at François and the latter read murder in the depths of his eyes but he did not mind. He knew Dan would follow so he led the way.

It seemed that the incident had aroused François's curiosity, making him sharp and almost vindictive in pursuing his object, which was to get to the bottom of this mystery. He knew he had an advantage on Dan in having saved his life and meant to take advantage of the fact. This was scarcely consistent with the strict code he had always followed in his relations with his rival, but on the other hand this strange man affected him strangely, and though he might at some time or other wonder why he acted as he did, nevertheless he was determined to see this business through once for all.

As for Dan he was tortured by fear, and the ex-

perience he had just gone through unnerved him, leaving him at the mercy of one with a stronger will than his. As he knew François was in the dark about the occurrence he was willing to put the Captain's stubborness, as he called it, to the test more than hoping that his temerity might be punished.

"If he'd been in my place," thought Dan, "he would be willing enough to call it quits and not place his head in the lion's mouth."

On the way up the hill to Zack Keen's temporary home, François plied the old man with questions.

"Since there were three of you, and only one to be taken, why did you creep up with a knife, if you did not intend to murder him?"

"I meant to frighten him into immediate surrender, that was all, on my word of honor."

"Then what did you intend to do next?"

"Bind him, and take him home with me to show him off as a worthless coward that he is."

"Take care, Mr. Keen, if you are not able to prove what you are saying you will get into trouble. I am seeing this business to the end, but if you are guilty—"

"Just wait and you will see."

Dan shuddered and whimpered:

"I tell you the fellow is out of his mind. Better turn back, François, while there is yet time."

"Young man, turn at your peril," said Keen.

"Put down those guns," commanded François, "I thought you understood I gave my word for myself and companion."

"We have no fear where you are concerned, besides I have no business with you," said the old man, "it is your friend. However, boys, obey him."

Jim and Bob handed their rifles to François.

"How do you know I will not take advantage of you?" asked François as he waved back acceptance of the weapons.

"We have no mutual grievance," answered Keen.

"But why did you run the risk? Couldn't I have shot straight at your heart instead of catching both your arms in line and breaking them. I'm surprised at you. Really, you've bungled worse than a schoolboy. And with a jaw like you've got, I wouldn't have thought it of you. By the way, if that feature of yours had caught my eye at first, you might not have got off so easily."

Keen did not answer.

They walked on in silence for a few minutes,

then as Dan strayed from them a bit, Keen motioned to François:

"I'm afraid he'll get away. You see it's because my daughter's praying that I've made a botch of it. I always do when she pulls."

The Captain stared at the ugly face. He made the mental comment: "There's something to him and in it."

At the request of Keen his sons walked with Dan a little in advance. The old man leaned on François, but only occasionally, and when the ascent was steep.

Gray dawn was already turning to blushing red in the east, and up on that high point where the party was traveling, the light, unhampered by shadows made it quite easy to see the five men long before they came within speaking distance. On the porch of the house, sheltered by trees, low and spreading, an old woman was standing. A younger one stood a few paces from her, her eyes shaded by one hand.

Keen and François were now heading the others, and the blue eyes that pierced through the intervening shrubbery rested on François. A shadow of disappointment overcast her features.

"Well?" asked Mrs. Keen.

Her daughter did not answer, her heart stood

still as her eyes wandered to the other stranger. But something confused her.

It was only for a second. Before Mrs. Keen could realize what was happening, Katie rushed to the party and ran up to her father.

"How can I thank you!" she cried, but it was to the second stranger that she rushed with outstretched arms.

"My husband! my husband! I knew you would come if you were still alive. Thank God with me, everybody."

Dan blushed to the roots of his hair and looked about him as if he would escape.

The young woman did not seem to mind his silence and embarrassment but clung to him crying hysterically: "My husband! my husband!"

The mother advanced weeping.

François was motionless with astonishment. Dan looked at him appealingly, but the Captain gave a withering scowl in response which made the culprit's face blanch until he resembled a dead man.

"Speak to me, tell Father all about us; he is my husband, Dad, and now you see for yourself—"

More to stop her wailings than from any feeling, Dan said tamely: "Katie!"

That satisfied her and she began running her hands over his face and calling him pet names.

The Captain could stand it no longer, so he turned away from the group.

Mrs. Keen ran up to him and invited him into the house.

Once there, the couple was forgotten or rather neglected for a while until Zack Keen's wounds were dressed. François assisted the boys and Mrs. Keen to fix splints about his arms and afterwards made him comfortable in an armchair. The pain was too great for him to pay much attention to Dan, and very soon he dropped into unrousable sulking.

The mother told François the story in a few simple sentences.

During the war while her husband and sons were in the army, this man,—pointing to Dan—giving his name as Daniel Henderson had come to their home. After a few days she noticed he made love to her daughter Katie, and when she rebuked him for taking advantage of the trusting girl, he being a stranger to them, nothing would suffice but an immediate marriage. It was solemnized in the little village church. If proof were required she could produce the marriage certificate at once. There was nothing very unusual about the whole

affair until just as the minister was pronouncing an additional blessing on the couple after the ceremony, soldiers came galloping by and the recently wedded Daniel Henderson made his escape through the window. From that hour he had never been heard of.

Mrs. Keen continued to say that once her husband thought he got trace of her daughter's husband in Wallace's gang, but Katie would never believe that her husband could be associated with Wallace. And although to excuse him for not coming back to her she at times declared Daniel must be dead, she did not really think so.

The Keens were of good stock and had plenty of money and property, but Mr. Keen was so sensitive in his regard for his family name in the community where they had lived for generations back, that he left the place, taking an oath never to return until he found *the* man dead or alive.

The mother went on to describe Katie's love for this Daniel. It was all-consuming and had become a mania, a reality, that nothing could induce her to forget.

François heard the strange story through and sat for a long time as if stupefied by some powerful drug.

At last he asked: "How did you ever happen to come to this out-of-way place?"

"My husband seems to have gone off his head a bit—he loves Katie so. This Daniel had told Katie he came from the wild country between De Soto and Ste. Genevieve; he also said his father owned mines that would be great some day. We heard about the mines up this way, at Vallée, and Pa came here a short time ago to search out every man in the whole country. When Katie said Daniel was dead he always said: "No scoundrel ever dies young."

"It is true, Mrs. Keen, that Dan's father is at the head of a great mine. I can assure you it is so for I'm interested in it.

"By the way, my name is Jean François. I was hopeful, however, that some mistake has been made. Anyway, I pledge you my word that Dan takes your daughter as his wife and does what is right and honorable by her. Should he refuse, he will have to deal with me."

"Do you really mean this?" asked Keen.

"Yes, and you may take my word as final."

François was surprised at the vehemence of his assertions. He could not explain to Keen the pressure he meant to bring to bear on Dan through some discovery in the latter's past which Keen's

statements and his wife's corroborated. It would never have occurred to François to make use of anything detrimental to Dan Douglas in order to further his own schemes as he might have done long ago, but within the last hour Dan's defences had been stormed and taken and he was now at the mercy of any right thinking man.

Keen suddenly roused himself and asked:

"What's his real name? who's he, after all?"

"Well, I know his father and mother—they live not more than ten miles from here. They are Mr. and Mrs. Donald Douglas. Dan's father is quite respectable—and so is his mother," he added.

François got up and went out, followed by Mrs. Keen.

Dan and Katie were still standing where he had left them.

"Mr. Douglas," he called, "I wish to speak with you." Then as Dan hesitated he commanded: "Come here at once, sir."

He came instantly, with his head down like a thief caught robbing a widow.

"Just a word with you," said the captain. To the young wife he said: "Go in with your mother."

But Katie would not budge until her mother spoke to her. She then followed her reluctantly.

"Mr. Dan Douglas, what have you to say for yourself?" demanded François.

Dan's spirit had gone. Since the occurrence by the cliff he seemed to have lost all presence of mind and was like a piece of pliable clay.

"Don't you see I'm guilty? Well, I'm at your mercy, I suppose, as I'm also at the end of my rope with these people."

His tone, though resistless, infuriated François.

"If it were not for your young wife, Dan, I'd kill you as I would a viper. That's the mercy I would show you."

Dan was pale and he trembled. François was besides himself with anger.

"You damnable wretch!" he cried. "You cur!"

"Can't you be more considerate? Don't be so hard on a fellow." Dan looked dejected.

"Don't presume on—our acquaintance, you wretched, soulless disgrace of God's image. Dan Douglas—"

"Please, François—"

"Have you turned beggar now? I've known you for a deserter of your army; a member of Wallace's Gang I suspected you to be after my meeting with the officer at Ste. Genevieve's, I am certain of it at this minute after my talk with Mrs. Keen. Dan Douglas, you are that same Dan Billings the

hotel keeper declared to be dead, the very man the authorities were looking for, and a word from me would put you in prison for life!"

François had to pace to and fro to keep from striking down the man he addressed.

Dan was paler than before and did not dare say one word in self-defence.

Suddenly as if the idea had just occurred to François he paused in his walk and looking straight at Dan.

"And you would have married Virginia Bardsdell?" he cried. "You?—YOU?" He clinched his teeth and advanced a few steps towards Douglas.

Dan whimpered. Then he backed before his antagonist's threatening attitude.

François was besides himself with anger. He could not strike the coward who now stood leaning against the wall of the house and on whose brow large drops of sweat stood out like beads. Despair shone in the culprit's eyes. The strong manhood in François whispered to him pity for the weak.

"Dan," he exclaimed, "I'm willing to give you one chance for—your father's sake and still more for your mother's and this innocent girl whom you have deceived. There is indeed one way of retrieving yourself. Take this trusting and loving young woman to wife. Acknowledge her and

honor her. But I advise you to tell her the truth about it all; she loves you and will forgive. Start from this moment to live an honorable life."

"And—?"

"Yes; I'll keep your secret. But falter just once and you'll regret it the rest of your life. Do you take the chance?"

"I do," said the subdued Dan with more real earnestness than he ever felt and evinced since his birth.

"It seems to me, with all due respect for your father, that you and he have a mania for marrying good women and leaving them. As it is my privilege to stop you right now I shall take advantage of it. Come!"

Dan accompanied François back to the house into the dining-room where the Keens awaited their return.

François addressed the group:

"Mr. Daniel Douglas has promised me and promises you, Mr. and Mrs. Keen and sons and you, Mrs. Douglas, that he means to acknowledge his wife and stand by her always. Am I not right, Mr. Douglas?"

"I agree to all Mr. François has said. Certainly I shall provide for my wife and acknowledge her

before the world." Dan's *aplomb* had returned in full swing.

"Now, Mr. and Mrs. Keen, I exact from you a promise that you will not interfere in any way between these two, nor seek to harm your daughter's husband by word or deed. I expect the same from Mrs. Douglas's brothers."

The promises were readily given by all, except old man Keen who only very reluctantly agreed that he would wait and see how his daughter fared at the hands of the man who had already caused her to shed tears.

The sight of Katie clinging to her husband finally overcame Keen's opposition. That she was proud of Dan was obvious by the way she looked up at him despite the cloud of doubt that hung over the group. Her tenderness seemed to touch a responsive chord in Dan's heart and to François's satisfaction the husband placed a protecting arm about his wife and drew her to him.

A few minutes later Captain François turned his back on the reunited pair and wended his way towards Bonne Terre. One thought was uppermost in his mind; Virgina was in reality free.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A NEW MAN.

Unconsciously Captain François had permitted himself to be supplanted in Bonne Terre by more aggressive men. Although not wanting in energy, as has been already stated, his temperament suited him admirably for a gentleman of leisure. In capability, there was no one superior to him among the men directing the mining company, and, with a slight degree of experience more than he possessed, nobody could have managed the development better than François. But absence at war and the accident that followed with its relapse due from over-exertion in taking exercise had intervened to make him loosen his grip on the situation. Gradually the reins slipped altogether into the hands of others on the alert for opportunities, and the original owner and Master of Bonne Terre acquiesced in permitting more enterprising heads to plan a greater future for the mining camp.

This inactivity, enforced or otherwise, by de-

grees sapped from him initiative to forge his way ahead. Old Dade watched his young friend and wondered when he would stand upon his ground and fight for recognition. That an awakening would take place sooner or later he never doubted, so while he fidgeted over what he termed Jean's "blarsted procrastination" and relieved his mind by wearing off his impatience by sundry wise sayings to Bud, he felt all the while that the blood of old Paul would boil over some day and bring about in his son the desired crisis.

The realization came with the return of François from his hunting expedition with Dan Douglas, and as a direct result of the ascendency which recent events had gained him over his rival.

There was no time wasted in recriminations against Virginia's former lover. François had once for all expressed to him his contempt for his conduct and when they next met no sense of self-importance inflated him, nor did he seek to belittle the younger Douglas in the estimation of the community. But after his continuous battling with destiny as far back as he could remember, François appreciated the fact that he was given an oar to drive his boat out of a sluggish eddy that for years had repelled all his efforts, and he meant to use it.

So having settled Dan Douglas's future and

fired his own blood, ambition awoke in the breast of the Master of Bonne Terre and drove away all thoughts of the hunt. With rifle-strap slung over one shoulder, he turned his face homeward and every step that brought him nearer quickened the working of his brain. He asked himself questions and answered them. He discovered his mistakes and acknowledged them. His powers of mind, unused and fogged to a standstill, broke their moorings and began to work out into the free open right of way.

Just past midday Jean François walked into Dade's Inn—a new man.

Minor difficulties were arising in the development work and the engineers had just come over to ask Silas if he knew the whereabouts of Dan Douglas since his father declared he had not seen him for a day or more. Dan was usually the one to whom the men applied when wheels did not revolve as they should. Whatever the younger Douglas's faults, diligence was always placed to his credit and he never failed those who expected it from him. His absence at the moment was considered unaccountable.

As Silas who was seated on the porch craned his neck to peer over the railing at the men who stood on the walk in an expectant attitude, reluctant to

return to the mining plant without obtaining some satisfactory reply, François advanced from the hallway.

"Mr. Dan Douglas, sirs, expects to return in a few days with his wife, and as some one must look after those matters I shall undertake to do so, inasmuch as I feel able to shoulder my duties again. You may expect me at the mines at one o'clock."

"Why, Captain François, you come as a God-send," said Mr. Garland, the engineer in charge. "It never occurred to me that you might be interested, or we would have applied to you directly."

"Why, of course he's interested," put in Dade, "or else why should he have been laid up from the effects of the explosion at the mines. But I forgits, that's before you'ns ever thought of comin' here to these diggin's."

"I beg your pardon, Captain François, I had never heard your name mentioned by the Douglases, so I thought—"

"That's all right, Mr. Douglas never thought it necessary to mention me because he has a leasing contract on my lands. What's wrong?"

"It's the workmen, the drillers, we can't get anything out of them. They're a lazy set."

"Is that all? We'll soon settle that. I know most of them."

And François soon set matters straight. There was that fetching fire about him that caused men to obey and follow whenever he chose to use his powers of leadership. There was no bluff or parade play in him—"he jist does it though people seem not to acknowledge it," Dade said later on to the men who commented on his masterly handling of the men at the drills.

Whereas the engineer lost his temper and swore at the drillers, and even Dan Douglas went into rages and threw things about aimlessly, François went in and did things. He neither swore nor raged, but there was that fearless glint in his eye which told a workman to obey orders or call for his time and pay envelope.

When the six o'clock whistle blew that evening, François, the general foreman since noon, came up black and oily, with a monkey-wrench in one hand and two small drills in the other. The force, altogether too inadequate for the work in progress had been reorganized.

In passing Dade's Store, François met Henry Garland, the engineer and superintendent.

"Everything is straight, Mr. Garland. At seven in the morning, men will be at their posts. I'll be

there to direct the work in all shafts. In order to expedite hoisting in the main shaft, I shall require a new inch and a quarter rope. Will you please have Sandy take it down to-night and deliver it to Downing, the watchman?"

"What?—is Downing watching again?"

"Yes, I sent for him as soon as I got the engines going."

"The rascal balked on Mr. Dan Douglas and me ten days ago."

"You'll find him on duty for night shift this week."

One of the company's blacksmiths came up just then. François turned to him:

"Joe, how many drills have you sharpened, ready for use?"

"Fifteen, I believe."

"That's good. We shall require them at the mouth of the shaft, at seven. Lest you may not be able to get a tool cart in the morning, wouldn't you like to send them down to the watchman to-night?"

"Yes, Sir."

"I say, Joe! Those drills you sent down this morning were too soft. Temper the next lot a bit more—we're cutting into harder rock now."

"Yes, Sir; they'll be more up to mark after this."

The men went their way.

Further on François met Virginia. She looked him over from head to foot and said:

"Your old self again? That's right. Oh! don't mind that smut on your face and your rolled-up sleeves, I think them becoming to a man of your strength."

François did not seek to detain her but watched her as she followed the road to Dade's Store,—slackening his steps to give her a chance to get ahead of him.

Her comment, not to say compliment, was quite sufficient. François became conscious for the first time that a woman approves of an industrious strong man. Why had she never told him before that she liked him better with spots on his face? She had seen him in working clothes many times before without evincing any interest in his pursuit. François did not know that she read in his face the spirit of a new man.

At the table, over at the Inn, Bud said things would move again now the Captain was willing to direct. Bud had been for quitting a few days previous to this, but if the organization held under François—and it would—he could manage his part better, and did not want to stop.

François went out to the woodpile and sitting upon the kindling block prepared to smoke a pipe. Bud followed him there shortly, dressed for a walk.

"Ho, Cap, not going?"

"No; I've walked enough today. The work this afternoon was tiring."

"I should say it was. You're perhaps undertaking too much for a man who's been—resting and—"

"And idling. That's the word and that's just what I've been doing, — idling."

"Well, never mind that, Captain. You've been hard hit. Now don't go on and overwork."

"I shall not. I'm quite myself once more, Bud. I should have resumed work weeks ago."

"All right, then. I'm glad to hear you speak so."

Bud went on a few steps, drew out his watch for the time, and unexpectedly came back.

"I'm far too early."

He looked at François who was contentedly puffing away.

"Cap, I've wanted to mention something to you for a long time. If you will pardon my boldness, I'll do it now and be done."

"Well?"

"It's of Virginia I would speak."

"Yes?"

Bud thought he was given permission to go on, so he sat on a rick of wood in front of François and began at once:

"Of course, it's no business of mine, but because I regard you as a friend I dare broach the subject." At this point Bud suddenly stopped. He would have given anything now to refrain from speaking, but it was too late, an inner force urged him on.

"It's no affair of mine, as I've just said, but—" then he plunged into his subject and went on recklessly:

"You must have noticed that Virginia looks upon you with warmer feelings than she did formerly. And now that her engagement with Dan is off—you know it's off, don't you?—I think it but the right thing to do for you to come forward instead of holding back as you're doing. Both Flora and I have been wondering at your conduct of late. Why, man, you've not been out with us since that night when we came near being caught in the storm and you strayed away from us. I'm sure, Cap, you have not set your heart on anyone else for you would have to look far and not find her equal or at least her superior. Of a surety, there's Flora, but you—"

François knocked the ashes out of his pipe and replaced it in his pocket, looking right at Bud all

the while. That rather disconcerted him in his attempt in the role of adviser.

"Allow me to interrupt you, Bud. What's ever put it in your head that Virginia cares for me? I've never been able to persuade myself that she does —that is in the way you mean."

"Why, Cap, it's as plain as can be. Flora and I both—"

"Is that the way it stands with you? Am I the first to hear the good news about you and—"

"Nonsense, Cap. What are you thinking about?" and Bud reddened to the back of his ears. "There is no such idea in my head. Miss Flora is very kind to me and that is all, positively all. You know I'm in no position to marry for a long while yet."

"Well, Bud, although I do think it an awkward subject to discuss—for the present—I must admit to you that all thoughts of marriage are impossible to me. Besides I assure you that you are altogether wrong when you infer that Virginia would consent to be my wife."

"No, Cap, you can't persuade me to the contrary. I'm sure that if you'd press your suit—"

"Look here, Bud, who and what am I that I should presume to ask any woman to give her life to me?

"It has always occurred to me that it is absurd for people to assume that because a young man associates with a particular lady he must necessarily propose to her, that is a matter for the two to decide and no one else should make suggestions."

"I beg your pardon. I had no idea of being indiscreet."

"I forgive you for I understand your motive but, Bud, can't you understand? I'm not in a position to marry anyone. Very shortly I shall join your little party, as of old, but put all those notions of proposing out of your head. Is there no friendship possible between unmarried men and women? Are all not free?"

Bud slowly arose without answering and with a significant gesture he seemed to dismiss the subject.

"Good-bye, François. I wish you'd let me go down to the mines with you in the morning. I'd like to go through the main shaft. I've been puzzled over something there and would like to get your opinion about it."

"All right. We'll go together."

CHAPTER XXIX.

DOUBTS.

When men delve into the earth to seek treasures, in most cases there are scientific indications which guide investigators to these beds of wealth, but often hope is the sole driving force that sustains operations until success crowns effort. However, in both cases doubts arise to dishearten and frequently cheat enterprisers of the goal.

Bonne Terre had already passed through a number of the vicissitudes common to mines and miners in the early stages of development. The fact that the pockets were exhausted made it more difficult to keep up a maximum of faith in the face of discouragements. Hence, when anything went wrong, such as changing from one rock stratum to another, or a sign failed, there was a wavering and variation in persistency of effort.

It so happened that shortly after François became master of the situation and reorganized the handling so as to get every part of the work to move simply and easily, development drillings did

not produce expected results. Several holes were put down and abandoned. Two huge shafts sunk below the hundred-foot level were also left as monuments to large sums lost. These operations ran up the expenses of the syndicate to thousands of dollars. As yet there was no result to justify the optimists. Capitalists who had invested funds began to ask questions.

On top of these ominous forebodings, Dan Douglas returned and went about among the men with a glowering frown which created distrust and unrest.

Among the first who weakened was Adolf Birsch. Then followed the disheartening of Donald Douglas and two of his St. Louis associates. Birsch frankly told the engineer he thought all had made a mistake. The experienced miners worked on nevertheless, not so confidently perhaps, but steadily, and urged the Syndicate to stand by its agreement to spend the full amount agreed upon, win or lose.

Those who had hoped much for the future of the village on the three hills shook their heads in doubt. It seemed as though the place were doomed to irreparable oblivion—a spot to be looked back upon where lingered an ephemeral dream of great-

ness. Even old Silas Dade and the few first settlers that remained ceased to be enthusiastic.

Of course this chasm between the known and the unknown had only just been reached. The men who were responsible for the success or failure did not foresee the immediate climax in the undertaking.

There were other doubts that took precedence. They began about this time to be formulated in questions: why were conditions not so favorable as the Douglases had described them to be when the development was discussed in New York? Was Dan Douglas as dependable as he was thought to be at the time and as he represented himself to be? Was he playing an honest game? In any case why did he absent himself from the mines when he was most needed, and on the other hand who was this capable man, Jean François, who was now conducting operations? Why did he talk as if financially interested in the mines—his name did not appear when the mines were first mentioned?

Two of the Eastern members of the Syndicate returned to New York and reported on the outlook and conditions at Bonne Terre.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE CRISIS.

No improvement was shown in the development work. The Syndicate was also two weeks in arrears in paying the fifty men employed. On a Friday, a letter from New York was received, stating that the Syndicate in body would shortly visit Bonne Terre to inspect the mining prospect with a view to deciding upon a policy to be pursued. The message urged that work be pushed forward as rapidly as possible, so that the property might appear to advantage.

These dilatory tactics did not suit the men, and as no mention of wages due was made, a general strike was declared.

François tried to persuade the workmen to continue the drillings, but they refused, assuring him they meant no personal affront to him by disobeying.

Dan Douglas spent most of his time at home, with his wife who apparently had quite won him over judging from his devotion to her. When ap-

pealed to, he did not lift a finger to stop the catastrophe that threatened the welfare of the company. Donald Douglas and Adolf Birsch with renewed interest in the enterprise stood by François, but they refused to guarantee the men's wages, and François was not financially able to do so.

Everything came to a standstill.

There was some delay in the arrival of the Syndicate and that caused the faint-hearted to say the field was deserted. Many miners left, and the remaining ones seldom visited the property. In the parlance of the community, Bonne Terre was dead.

During these dreary days, François frequented the scene of operation. As far as possible, he kept a watchful eye on everything in order to preserve the machinery against possible and needless harm. In performing these duties, it was often necessary for him to go to Donald Douglas's home, a pretty establishment recently set up by the head of the mining company for Theresa, once more his beloved wife. This had also become the temporary home of Dan and his Katie. The news of Dan's marriage came as a surprise to Bonne Terre and needless to say that the groom bore the notoriety with his usual independence.

François occasionally met Dan at his father's home and their relations were severely polite. Dan

resented having to look upon François as his master, in a way. Whenever possible, they avoided meeting as if from mutual consent, but François kept the secret and took no advantage of the damaging knowledge in his possession. Of course, Dan's wife felt particularly grateful to the Captain and considered him a man of impeccable character. In other words she owed her happiness to François,—and we shall presently see how her friendship became of consequence to the Master of Bonne Terre.

While the first few days of the strike were fraught with serious dangers and François was striving to maintain forbearance among the men, old Basil happened to come down to the village. On perceiving the state of affairs he spent the day with his young friend advising him about many puzzling problems. In parting, he asked François if his mining lease was in order.

"I've lost it," replied François. "In my excitement to get off to war, it was overlooked, and, of course, when my cabin was burned it was lost with all my belongings."

"You would do well to procure a copy. This complication with the syndicate may mix up interests—may involve your land in some way. It is possible also that the lease becomes forfeited."

"Oh, my dear friend! Mr. Douglas is the soul of honor."

"You mean of course the older man?"

"Yes; the lease was executed to him."

"Well, I'm glad it's not the son you're alluding to. I never liked the cut of the dandy's eye."

"I'm sure everything is quite all right, Basil."

"Have they paid your royalties—when there were royalties?"

"Yes."

"And your taxes?—have you been paying them regularly?"

"Mr. Douglas has been paying them for me."

Basil showed his surprise by shaking his head.

"You should never entrust such business as that to others."

"Mr. Douglas will give me a copy of the lease at any time. I have only to mention my wish to him."

"Well, as your friend I advise you to look after your titles, so just see that you get hold of a copy of your lease before the arrival of the members of the Syndicate. You may find that those Easterners will try to make a new deal."

"Oh, very well then if you think that might be the case."

"Get your deeds ready, François. Listen to an old experienced man."

"Basil, I have no deeds. You know my father left me no papers. I suppose his deeds are recorded at Farmington, Silas told me Father wanted the cabin and all its contents burned at his funeral, so I never thought of any deeds."

"Go to Farmington and procure copies of them. Was there ever a probate of your father's estate? No, of course that's something you never thought about having done, but the law protects you. Your possession took place automatically, and you could cure all defects by filing affidavits of people who know you to be Paul's only child. These old-timers are getting scarce now and that's another reason for you to see to it at the earliest opportunity."

"It is very kind of you to remind me, Uncle Basil. Once upon a time I was touchy on such matters but I have learned by this time to value good advice so unselfishly given."

But Basil kept on:

"And what about all these houses built upon your land?"

"Oh! they are on lease—so Mr. Douglas told me."

"And you receive your share of the benefits accruing therefrom?"

"No; I've always been under the impression that the lease gives all that to Mr. Douglas."

"Perhaps so, but get the copy of the lease and study it over."

These inquiries on the part of Basil set François thinking, and as soon as the excitement lulled, he went to Mr. Douglas and asked for a copy of the mining lease.

Dan was present, although when the Captain came in he would have slipped away if he could have done so without appearing unseemingly rude and awakening his father's curiosity. But when François unsuspectingly and unguardedly said he had lost the lease and wanted a copy, Dan was all attention and thankful he was with his father at the time.

"Pa," said he, "your papers are all with your lawyer in New York, are they not?"

"Y—yes, that's so. I had almost forgotten. You see, Captain, I rely on Dan's judgement on those matters."

"But the lease was made out to you and not to Dan," replied François severely.

"Then, Pa, you'll have to write and ask the lawyer to send you a copy."

That concluded the conversation, but François made up his mind then and there to go to Farmington and satisfy himself as to the status of his titles.

A day later, he mentioned the matter to Dade and Bud, and asked them to accompany him to Farmington in order to make affidavits that he was the only child of Paul and Helen François.

"But do you own the land?" asked Bud tentatively.

"Most certainly. I've never sold it. My father's dying request was for me to hold on to the land. I've only leased it to Mr. Donald Douglas for mining purposes."

"Well, I just asked to make sure how you stood, and if such is the case you'd better lose no time in seeing about it. I was talking with William Carter not long ago and he told me you did not own the land."

"William Carter don't know what he's saying, for that haint true," put in Silas decidedly. "I was present when 'Squire Moore swore them to the lease. I heerd it read, an' kin swear black an' blue 't was a lease."

"Yes, it was a lease, Bud—I had it and it was burned with my cabin during the war."

"Well, if it suits you and Dad, we'll go to

Farmington to-morrow. It's unfortunate that 'Squire Moore is dead."

François was puzzled and remained thoughtful for a while. He decided to set out with his friends early the next morning.

The drive through the country was pleasant and invigorating. Summer seemed to have stolen away in the night, and fall with its frosty breath had already nipped the leaves and tinted them red, golden, and brown. Hickory nuts were strewn on the road. Wild grapes hung in clusters from huge vines that matted the boughs of trees. And along the way, mast-fattened swine started up from their rootings to utter a guttural "booh!" then scampered away through the woods while 'possums shambled down from fruit-laden persimmon trees. On every hand were evidences of preparations for winter—farmers were digging potatoes and cutting corn and groups of merry children with sacks and split-cane baskets were gathering hazelnuts.

François and the two Dades, on horseback, rode on among these scenes and remarked on the beauty wrought by the change of seasons. Now and then they drew rein at some gate to ask the way because they had gone through a short-cut that was new to them and wanted to get back to the old St. Louis wagon-road.

By eleven o'clock, however, they reached the quaint little county-seat town, and hitched their horses to the racks back of Dalton's Store. Scores of wagons, loaded with wheat and corn, were rolling in from various parts of the county, for it was a Saturday, and long queues of these equipages were lined up in front of Giesing's Mill, awaiting their turn to discharge the grain and get flour in exchange. Perched upon the springseats of the wagons with the farmers were their wives wearing cotton dresses and sunbonnets, while sitting on the sacks behind, gay with a holiday spirit, frolicked a half dozen children. Young men of the country, called "young bucks," galloped into town with a dash, their hats tilted to one side, and their horses' saddles and bridles resplendent with rosettes and dangling thongs. All shouted Indian war-whoops as they entered the court-house square.

Such was Farmington in those times on market days.

On the way up Main Street to the Square, Silas stopped and talked with several of the young lawyers, among them, Marion Carter, Jasper Burke, M. R. Smith, and H. B. Ledbetter. For each one he had a "howdy" and took special delight in introducing his son and Captain François.

It took only a few minutes' consultation in Wil-

liam Carter's office to convince François that according to the county records he held no title to the lands in question. On a certain day, by warranty deed, he had conveyed to Donald Douglas the land in fee simple.

François's amazement knew no bounds! He looked from Silas to Bud and then again at the lawyer. Bud was prepared beforehand but Silas was shocked.

When questioned about the lease Mr. Carter informed François that there was no record of such nor of mortgage nor again of deed of trust.

Dade told the story of the execution of the lease and the payment of one thousand dollars.

"Yes, that is the consideration named in the warranty deed."

"But since I can swear and he can, too," pointing to Bud, "can't we'uns be taken for witnesses and prove that the land is François's?"

"The rule is you cannot change written testimony by oral, so if you and Bud and François testified, Douglas and his son could claim the right and deny all you said."

"But," persisted Dade, "we'uns could prove that the Captain's been getting royalties for years."

"That would help. However, all you can do

is to file suit for quiet title, which I shall do if you wish. Is that agreeable to you, Captain François?"

The upshot of the conference was that Mr. Carter was retained to recover the land. Proper affidavits were prepared and signed, then the three men departed for home.

Their return was less cheerful than their coming. François had very little to say. Dade made a few trite remarks on the St. Louis men, and Bud went on ahead.

Although it was later than they expected it would be when they reached Bonne Terre, they went together to the Douglases.

Donald and his son came out to the gate.

François said:

"Gentlemen, the three of us are just returned from Farmington. I went down there to look up my lands and I found that instead of signing a lease before the war, you had me sign a deed. Now the document you read at the time was assuredly a lease. What am I to understand about this business?"

"You signed a deed and a contract for commission on the output," said Dan nonchalantly—"Why, Captain, don't you remember signing two papers?"

"You know very well I signed a lease, Dan Douglas, and when you call it a deed you lie!"

Quicker than words François was off his horse and was on the point of striking Dan a terrible, felling blow, when Dade and Bud interfered to prevent any violence.

François was pale with anger but the interruption gave him time to reflect. He contented himself with charging the Douglases with fraudulent conduct towards him and notified them that suit had been filed against them that very day.

The whole time Donald Douglas stood like one in a trance and looked fearfully ashamed. He did not try to defend himself; Dan held his ground but did not dare look François in the face when he saw the effect of his explanation.

On Monday following, the Syndicate arrived *en masse*. On Tuesday the Douglases were served with summons and copies of the petition in François's suit to quiet title, and each member of the Syndicate was served by the sheriff with a copy of the *lis pendens* which had been filed.

CHAPTER XXXI.

SUSPENSE.

The Syndicate refused to do anything with the mines until the question of title should be settled. Its several members were loath to abandon the project and lingered aimlessly in the village. The men of the vicinity who knew something of the deadlock feared a loss to everybody, and urged Donald Douglas to compromise with François so that capital could push forward the work. But Dan said "No," to his father and persuaded him that the issue must be decided in the court of last resort.

François remained firm. He was dazed by the discovery that his father's home, his by lawful inheritance, the lands his father loved so that his dying request was for Jean to hold on to them at any cost, had been taken from him by fraud and contracted to be sold to the Syndicate should the mines prove valuable. He could scarcely understand how he stood in relation to them.

More than once he was tempted to waste no

time in law-suits against such men as the Douglases, especially now that he knew the father to be party to the deception that was practiced on him. Again, why should he keep Dan's secret? Why not put an end to the whole matter by exposing his conduct? But no; he had given his word and the breaking of it would not help his cause, neither would he have innocent women who had already suffered so much bear the brunt of the disgrace of father and son. He would stand on the merits of his case and expect justice accordingly.

But in the midst of these meditations, François's faith was momentarily shaken: what if an evil influence did attach itself to those surroundings where he was so severely tried in childhood and in manhood? would it not be wise to flee to parts unknown and start life where handicaps were not so persistent?

In this state of mind he thought of Virginia. Perhaps she might marry him if he were to take her to a new place, a place where his father's strange funeral and Paul's and Sam's ghosts had never been heard of? Here every turn he took resulted in defeat and chagrin.

This continual brooding produced on François

a sort of morbidness, and he finally resolved to go to Virginia and lay the plan before her.

François had been but a few times to Virginia's home since the apparition at his father's grave and he never in any way referred to it. Virginia from a feeling of delicacy refrained from mentioning it after her first surprised outburst at the moment. In consequence a feeling of reticence sprang up between the two so that it was not without a feeling of trepidation that François made up his kind to broach the subject anew.

The meeting, however, was cordial with just a slight touch of reserve, and after some commonplace talk François surprised the young woman by inviting her to walk with him along the Heights. Virginia suggested they stop on the way and ask Flora to join them. That brought François at once to the realization that he was about to lose his opportunity for a tete-a-tete and he quickly interfered, stating to Virginia that he must have a confidential talk with her and appealing to the friendship she had always so generously extended to him.

Virginia was more puzzled than ever but submitted gracefully to what she thought a whim on his part; until then he had always spoken

freely before Flora. As Virginia ran to her room for her bonnet her heart whispered to her that she would perhaps get a glimpse of what lay beneath the generally calm exterior of this man to whom she had given her love, and she paused a while and pressed her hands to her face to hide the blushes that she felt suffused her countenance as her heart beat faster and faster. When she returned she appeared to be more agitated than before.

The fact is that this was not the same Jean François she had known previously,—a man armed with even poise of mind and heart,—but a being driven to desperation who held out to her his hands as one who would be saved. In that short space of time her love grew a hundredfold and she was ready to receive him, and protect him. No man is so strong and wise but that he can gain and learn more wisdom when he trusts to an intelligent woman's intuition, tempered as it is by a spirit of justness rare in men.

On the way François told Virginia all over again what there was to tell from his boyhood to the present and she listened as if she heard it for the first time. This was, however, the only time he mentioned to her his transactions with the Douglases. It was not his intention

to spend any time discussing them, he only meant to use the incident as a stepping stone and then rush on and tell of his intention to abandon all and seek a new life among strangers if she—, but his courage failed him for a minute. How could he propose to her on top of this failure of his? Virginia unconsciously aided his weakness by speaking:

"But, Captain, why are you so despondent? You will win this case. When all things are weighed you will find that Dan Douglas does not stand as high in this community as Captain François."

"There are written documents to substantiate his claims."

"But surely, your lawyer must have told you that in some instances oral testimony is permitted to overthrow the most solemn instruments."

"On the contrary, he assured me that written instruments take precedence over verbal statements, and that word of mouth cannot be heard against such records. He did not mention any exceptions."

"But I assure you there are cases, rare cases I admit, but still it is so, for my Uncle Brewer discussed one before me, in Richmond, and I

know he could not be mistaken. I shall tell you about it some time, but now this is the only point of interest: oral testimony is effective."

"Well, to tell you the truth, I did not question Mr. Carter's statement. I was too amazed at the whole proceeding."

"My uncle—I wish he were living now, he was so learned—was saying that oral testimony or evidence of fraud will annul any paper, no matter what may be its pretentions. For instance, a will may be set aside on oral proof of fraud."

Virginia's clear, analytical mind continued to work.

"Now, Captain, look into your case again. Can't you prove by Silas Dade—he is a level-headed old man—that whatever paper you signed was executed while you were put under the influence of liquor?"

"Virginia, to my shame, I must admit that I was not coerced into drinking."

"No? but then here is evidence of fraud: if you meant to sell your land would you have agreed upon one thousand dollars as the price? Isn't that more than ridiculous? In any impartial person's opinion that suggests fraudulent intention. Besides, you can prove by Silas and Bud that you

received royalties on certain dates. You must have some of your royalty slips."

"The lawyer admitted that might help."

"But you have the slips?"

"Yes, several."

"Good. That will go far towards substantiating your claim that a lease was executed and not a deed. In this instance, you also have written instruments to uphold your statements." Virginia was wide-awake to the situation, she continued: "You say you have in your possession the note that Donald Douglas sent you inviting you to the Inn, 'to sign the contract with us.' "

François looked at Virginia with renewed interest in the discussion.

"I see the point you would make," he said, " 'Come over to the Inn to-night to sign the contract with us'—those are the exact words he used —implies that there is an instrument to be signed, wherein we both covenant to do certain things; whereas a deed is an *ex parte* conveyance."

"Mr. Carter has the reputation of being a most capable lawyer. See him at once, Captain, and explain the case to him in its minutest details. He would not overlook such elementary principles as you and I have just brought to the sur-

face. Don't you see what a good chance you have?"

"Yes, I see that I have a chance after all. And, Virginia—"

"Yes?"

"If I win I shall owe it to you, for I was discouraged a while ago."

"Yes?"

François looked up at his companion with increased admiration but his courage failed him a second time and his pride returned. How could he have thought of proposing to this young woman to run away and hide from those who had known her from childhood up or else, worse again, how could he ask her to share with him the annoyance, not to say disgrace, to which the mystery surrounding his name constrained him? But once more the feeling of ascendency over the Douglases, especially Dan, animated him. Even should he lose in the end, Bonne Terre could always count on him as an inhabitant.

Although he felt drawn to Virginia more closely than ever before, he decided that he must wait and win his rights first.

Virginia's last words to him were:

"Stand firm, Captain. Ignore the Syndicate if members approach you on the subject of compro-

mise. You hold the future of Bonne Terre in your hands and that is a good augur for the success of the suit. You see you are in spite of all the Master of Bonne Terre."

She watched François as far as she could and as each step carried him farther away her feeling of longing grew more and more intense, until with a shake of the head which sent her curls bobbing about as of old she gave a little sigh and said:

"What's the use? He will never speak. Flora doesn't know what she's talking about when she says—" and the sentence was never completed.

CHAPTER XXXII.

VISITORS.

IMMEDIATELY after the serving of notice of suit on members of the Syndicate visiting the mines, a meeting was held by the New York men in order to discuss the situation fully. Two of those present were young men who possessed more foresight and greater ability than their elders. One was Henry J. Ryan. He not only towered over his compeers in forcible executive initiative but more than equalled them in wealth. The other, Sam Bolivar, made a strong ally for Ryan, championing whatever policy his friend suggested.

At the meeting the three older men were in favor of annulling the contract and returning to the East, when Ryan interrupted and said:

"Such a course would, in my opinion, lose us the greatest mines of their kind in the civilized world. In addition, according to the terms of our contract, we would forfeit the thousands of dollars put into the development.

"I, for one, vote that we stay by it. Have I a second?"

"I'll stick," said Bolivar.

Therefore, as the two young men were successful New Yorkers who controlled more than half of the money, they overruled the views of their associates.

"What's your plan?" asked one of the bankers addressing Ryan.

"Stick right here."

"But stick to what, if that man François wins, we have no contract with him?"

"We're not going to give up even if Captain François wins—and I hope he will. His head is screwed on right and we can make a deal with him. We're not here to "do" anybody and neither are we here to be "done"; we're as necessary to Mr. François as his land is to him."

"How are we to stick?" asked another gray-bearded man.

"Stick by staying in this town, that is until a compromise is reached. We can't wait on courts. They do very well and all that, but they'll tie up the business until my friend's hair," pointing to Bolivar, "turns gray. No; that's out of the question, we can't and won't wait on the legal decision. What we must do is buy out both factions."

"How long do you count on waiting?" asked the first banker who addressed Ryan.

"Oh! if that's what's troubling you gentlemen, send word to your families—Sam and I are clear of that. Tell them you're enjoying the hunting in the Ozarks and you'll probably stay a few weeks after to—"

"That's it! 'recuperate' after our exertion!" put in a jolly, redfaced fat man, shaking as he laughed. "Ha! ha! that fellow Silas Dade has some of the best brand I've ever tasted." And he patted down the few, scanty locks that rested across his bald head.

"That's the way to look at it. We've got money in — if we're set out, we can make somebody 'smoke.'"

And so it was decided. Letters were sent away with the proper explanations, and, as they had brought guns with them, the people could not look upon their staying as a ruse. It was furthermore agreed that the management of negotiations — whatever course might be expedient—should be left entirely in the young men's hands.

"Now, Sam," said Ryan shortly after the meeting, "the thing for us to do is to make ourselves popular around here. The best people to meet are the girls. Seen any about?"

"By Jove, I saw two yesterday, but they're not 'girls' Henry. That fellow at the store calls them the 'gals.' I call them 'belles.' "

"Lose no time, find out where and how we must manage to get an introduction."

"Leave that to me. I thought they were sisters until I had a good look at them, but they're not, and that old-timer, Silas Dade, says he knows them."

Just then Dade came shuffling from around the corner.

"There he comes. He likes my brand of 'ter-backy'," continued Bolivar. "Come along. Let's sidle over and offer him a package. I always carry an extra one for an emergency."

"Goo-d Mornin', fellers!" cried Dade as soon as he spied the young men.

"Good morning, Uncle Dade."

"I believe you like my tobacco. I brought you a small package," said the wise Sam.

"Thank you, Sir. My old woman was a-tellin' me yesterday, she never enjoyed my smokin' until I tried what you give me. She says she act'ally likes the smell of it."

"All right. When I get back East, I'll send you some more so that you can smoke it altogether."

"Thank you, Sir."

"Uncle Dade, I've been telling my friend about those two girls you and I saw yesterday. You didn't tell me their names."

"Oh! Miss Virginy and Miss Flora!"

"Not sisters, I believe you said," and Sam winked at Si.

"Nope."

"Who are they?" asked Ryan.

"The gals? they'ns is fine ladies. There's more in this town but those two is what I calls peaches."

"Right you are!" cried Sam.

Ryan drew out a cigar which he presented to Dade.

"We would like to be introduced to them," he suggested.

"That's easy. They're not stuck up one bit like your city beauties which can't hold a candle up to them, no they haint stuck up."

"Well, when do you think you can manage it, Uncle?" asked Sam.

"They'ns is over to the store now, waitin' for me. Ha! ha! To buy somethin'? No, guess again. Just come to find out how me old woman is gettin' along. So, don't fall over yourselves, but come along casual-like and drop in. I'll do the knocking down to them."

"That suits. Go on Uncle, hurry before they get away."

The two friends watched Silas disappear in through the side door of the store. After a second or so, Sam said:

"Now, Henry, we'll 'drap in casual-like."

Flora and Virginia heard steps at the entrance of the store and before they could exchange glances with each other, they were being introduced to the young men, members of the Syndicate, Dade added rather proudly.

"Miss Birsch? why we met your father some time ago," and Henry Ryan launched into pleasant conversation with Flora while Bolivar and Virginia exchanged remarks about the town, its size, number of inhabitants before and after the war.

Dade was entertaining himself as he went back to fill Mrs. Birsch's kerosene can so as to have it ready for Malinda when she would call:

"After all, dadburn the Captain an' Bud. They'ns is too slow. The time they'ns a-been keepin' company with those gals passes me comprehension. I never could understand Jean. First, I thought he was after Flora, then Virginia. Dan's out o' the way now an' he's still danglin' on

like a crayfish on a bit of string. Bud's no better."

When Dade returned the girls and Sam and Ryan were to be heard laughing and chatting down the street.

The next morning, Ryan sent a note to Virginia and Bolivar likewise sent one to Flora, requesting the pleasure of calling. The selection of the lady to be called on was a matter of very short deliberation, for although they had paired off differently at the first meeting they soon discovered their mistake.

Permission was given and word soon spread over the village that the two young millionaires were paying formal calls at the Birsch and Bardsdell homes. The minute Malinda showed Bolivar into the parlor, she shot off to her sister's precincts and informed Jennie.

"Mr. Ryan's here right now, an' you'd better hurry back or Miss Flora 'll have to show him out herself, 'Linda. That won't never do with gentlemen like those."

Malinda did not lose a minute but spread the news on the way to all she met. Bud and François were not long in finding out about the callers and had to stand hearing the rumor that the two

belles of Bonne Terre were not averse to the attentions of the rich Yankees.

When Bolivar and Ryan met after their visit the following dialogue took place:

"I say, Sam, I wish we had met them sooner. Miss Bardsdell is the kind of girl that makes you feel every minute you spend away from her is time wasted. I wonder what she can find to interest her in this out-of-way place?"

"You're not ahead of me, Henry, and I want you to understand that I'm going in to win Miss Birsch. By Jove, man, she's a beauty—and so much life and go about her. If I succeed in talking New York to Flora Birsch you may cancel my membership in the Lambs' Club."

"Now for it."

"I give you my hand—what's under your hat?"

"Sam, Bonne Terre hasn't a rig of any sort—not a decent horse and buggy. I suggest we make a hit here—put some go into things."

"Count on me."

"All right. Get Bud Dade to drive us over to Farmington—we won't require him to drive us back."

There was no delay. Two days later, Ryan and Bolivar rode into Bonne Terre on the finest saddle horses money could buy in Farmington.

The accoutrements were dazzling and set the pair of pretty bays off to great effect. A few hours later, there appeared in the streets of the village, already agog over the horses, two of Lang & Brothers' new buggies, with double teams' glittering new harness, and in the rear box of each buggy was a side saddle with fancy bridle and blanket. All was delivered to the New Yorkers and installed in the barn at Dade's Inn.

The next afternoon, Saturday, two couples were out for a horseback ride. Ryan rode his prancing bay and Virginia sat gracefully on a sleek sorrel. Heads were popped out of doors and windows, and people on the street gazed, men and women alike. All Bonne Terre was awe-struck.

François and Bud stood on the porch of Dade's Store with old Silas as they cantered by—Bolivar and Flora had joined Ryan and Virginia and rode matches to their horses.

Silas spat a mouthful of tobacco juice far out into the dusty street.

"Sarves you right, boys. If they were your wives they wouldn't be out prancing about with those fellers. I know you'd like to make believe you don't care, but I kin see yer turnin' green in the gills. You shouldn't have left them roses a danglin' over the garden fence when you could

have had them for the askin'. Sarves you right."

"Cap and I are glad the girls are having a good time. Didn't you see us wave to them?"

"Git out! What else could yer do? Of course you waved to them, but it's your fault. Them city chaps haint to blame—decent fellers I call them. They'ns haint stuck-up a bit. That Ryan took a chaw of my terbacky yisterday just as old Marlins would have done, and he started spitting away like fury. 'Glad to see you're an 'sperienced hand at it' I said. Well you'ns kin judge them same as me they'ns is stayin' at the Inn same as you. If I'm not catawampus in my sizin'-up they'ns is smart chaps, and square. Money? yes, but Donald Douglas says they'ns made every nickel of it. Nor should I wonder."

"They are rather likable gentlemen," said François, "and I think they mean to play me fair."

"Glad to hear you say it, François, an' you an' Bud haint far behind those two city chaps as gentlemen. I know you an' Bud haint goin' to spoil the girls fun by doin' any bullyin' and pickin' a quarrel. That day's past. Remember, 'All's fair in love an' war.' Bless your souls, lads, I guess you haint never asked those gals— huh? Course you haint never asked them. What rights have you?-"

"Oh, Dad, you should not talk so."

"I'll just have my say all the same. You'ns oughter have popped the question ere this. They'ns 'd said 'yes' quicker 'n I'd say 'scat.' Now they've a right to hold their noses up in the air when you ask them."

Bud pulled his cap viciously over his ears and eyes and pulled François by the arm.

"Fiddlesticks! fiddlesticks!" cried Dade as the two friends walked off with their hands deep in their pockets and thoughts somewhat muddled by Silas's pointed remarks and raillery.

Silas was relentless, he called out at the top of his voice:

"No use o' lookin' down your noses like that—faint hearts never wins no pretty gal. Yer 'll have to buck up an' step to a livelier tune!"

"For goodness sake! hush!" Bud shouted back.

As they went on towards the mines, they heard Silas's "haw-haws!"

The next day, Sunday, two new top-buggies and two happy smiling couples drove to French Village and back!

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A RECONNOITERING.

In reality there was truth in what Silas said to François and Bud. They were the only two young men in that neighborhood who could have made eligible husbands for Flora and Virginia, and they had dallied along, fairly showered with the effusion of the girls' love, and if they had not altogether ignored it they nevertheless offered nothing in return.

What could the girls do? It was not their province to do the courting, neither could they wait forever on the good pleasure of the young men. Moreover, for some cause quite inexplicable to Virginia and Flora, they were conscious of having been neglected of late. In spite of Virginia's cordial and sympathetic reception of François a short time previously, he had lapsed into his former apparent indifference. Virginia was sadly puzzled.

Secretly François felt a pang at his heart. It seemed to him that he had loved Virginia all his life and to see her carried off by another, even

though he was worthy and rich, would be a greater blow than he could endure. All his other disappointments dwindled into insignificance, into infinitesimal pin-pricks when compared with this last loss which threatened him. And his hands were tied faster than ever. If he had felt some delicacy and pride at offering himself to Virginia when he was the sole aspirant to her hand, how did he feel now that a man like Henry Ryan seemed disposed to lay all his possessions at her feet?

The ghost story! how he shuddered at the thought. The task he had set himself to accomplish that he might win the girl he loved for his wife was no nearer completion—the "ghost" story had probably by this time reached the ears of the Syndicate. Now there was to the former drawbacks the great risk of losing all he thought he owned so securely.

Bud, also, in secret bemoaned his loss. He counted it as a loss for how could he get in an oar to save himself. Had it been in the antebellum days, he would have "fit somebody," as he would have expressed it then; but he had since then, through education and association learned the error of his ways, or rather that method of getting one's way. These words of his father: "You'ns haven't even asked them," nettled him sorely.

In as much as Bud shared with François the same hopes and fears, it was natural for them to seek consolation with each other. They found themselves in the same boat, drifting towards the falls, so they sought to unite with the oars to escape.

"Misery loves company," so as soon as François perceived how it stood with his friend he spoke:

"Your father was then not far wrong as you see now when he said our noses were out of joint."

"So he would have us look at it."

"We must admit he's nearer right than otherwise," continued the Captain.

"Well, I wouldn't acknowledge it to him. Things are bad enough without having to twit us about them."

After a moment's reflection Bud brightened up:

"Suppose we put it up to the girls at once, before those fellows make further headway. I can't stand the suspense."

"That would be folly now, Bud. We would be certain to get our wings singed if we rushed thus into the fire. And as for me, unless conditions are changed there is no hope. Never shall I bring disgrace on an innocent woman. I thank God I never spoke. But with you, Bud, the case is different and I cannot advise you."

"How can you be so cool about it?"

"I am not cool, but unless the mines are declared to belong to me I'm afraid I shall be obliged to walk to my own funeral march."

"Quit joking, François. You make me feel creepy."

"Well, after all, Bud, what's the use of our worrying. If the girls prefer us, if they really care they will remain true. Who knows, may be they are just enjoying the novelty of the change, and Flora will appreciate you all the more when these young men go."

"Why don't you count yourself in? what about Virginia?"

"You must remember, Bud, that we never 'asked them' as your father says." François preferred to ignore the meaning of Bud's questions.

Bud thought for a long while, and François also busied himself with his thoughts which were not very enlivening judging from the serious look in his eyes. As was their custom, the friends were sitting on the woodpile, smoking.

"Cap, do you mean that you will never propose to Virginia until you've cleared the mystery about your father?"

"Quite so. In which case you see how helpless I am,—that is in the present complication."

"Then, Cap, why don't you explode the theory of the ghost. That would be a great point gained."

François looked up.

"I never realized until this affair came up how it must worry you to have that story go the rounds, and it is still going, for this morning, Obediah, Birsch's negro told me he saw the ghost last night. I did not pay much attention to his tale until he assured me the ghost must be dying out—those were his words—he was walking so awful feeble-like. It might be wise to catch up with the spirit before it leaves this world for good."

François drew out of his pocket some bits of ore and crumbled the dirt off them, blowing off the dust as if that were his only preoccupation all the while. Bud was disappointed that his words should have no greater effect upon his comrade when the latter spoke:

"Bud, I've thought about this thing until I am all but distracted. It grinds hard on my patience. If you'll help me, and if we can induce your father to assist us, we'll run this thing to the earth. Your words have set me thinking. So Obediah said the ghost was feeble-like. To be frank with you, Bud, I make the proposal in view of the fact that Virginia and I together saw a man appear on my

father's grave—the last time we four went out together and climbed to the summit of Blue Hill—and the storm drove us homeward. Until then I believed all the talk to be the invention of idle women. But I saw the man, and for nights and nights afterwards I haunted the spot where I saw him disappear. I never saw him again. This is how we happened to see it: Virginia and I, if you remember were walking some distance back of you. We had strayed from the path and stood facing the chimney that marks the grave of both my parents. Suddenly, a stooped form in the nearby underbrush moved softly to the wall about the tomb. After striding over, it stood for a moment on the mound above the grave. Then followed a few seconds of utter darkness, when a lurid flash lighted up once more the spot where we had seen the figure, it was no longer visible. I know Virginia saw it because she gave a cry and said something that rings in my ears whenever anyone brings up the story. It hurt me to hear her say what she did, but the poor girl was frightened and—"

"And that is the reason you kept away from her and us afterwards? I understand."

"So far all my attempts at clearing up the mystery have been baffled. The spirit must have some

confederate on the outside or else how did it know I was watching? or perhaps it has some means of detecting someone's approach. It is no longer a thing of the imagination but a tantalizing reality. Feeling as I do, realizing that it is preventing me from getting the best out of life, you may perchance be able to have some idea of its harrowing effect on my nerves."

"H'm, Cap, why didn't you speak out sooner. You know Dad and I are always ready to stand by you."

"Do you really mean it? I never liked to speak of 'it' to your father."

"Here's my hand, Cap, — and here's another handshake for Dad. I'll speak with him."

"You know we must work in secret on this. If it were known that three or four of us are 'ghost-hunting,' it would sound ridiculous and might make matters worse than before."

"You're quite right."

"Whom could we get besides your father?"

"I would suggest Father Duncan," said Bud, "for if I guess your meaning correctly, it is not so much strength you require, for one of us would be sufficient to handle the ghost."

"Father Duncan would do fine. I want witnesses of unimpeachable character"

"Right."

The same night, while still enthusiastic over their plan, François and Bud called Silas and Father Duncan into conference in Si's den.

François made a concise statement of the case, not stopping to mention details of personal concern. It resulted that a solemn compact was entered into by the four men to make the secret investigations at once, and to persevere until they were convinced of one thing or the other.

Dade at first demurred:

"Jiminy Christmas! No! I haint having no truck in sich like. I'll do anything else for François, but not that."

The three men finally persuaded the old backwoodsman to join in, because when the discovery would be made, the people would readily believe him in preference to them. Even Father Duncan admitted that Si's influence exceeded his.

"That sounds mighty fine, an' I feel powerful proud to hear you say that, Father, but if we do make a 'scovery, ooh-ooh! the three of you'ns couldn't hold on to Silas Dade! I'd bust a gallus or get away!"

But this was all talk on Dade's part. He didn't believe in ghosts, for years before when the rumor

was started, he told the people there was no truth in it.

And so the compact was sealed amid jollying on Si's part and remonstrances from his companions. The mode of procedure was to be commenced at once: all four men were to conceal themselves in the thicket within one hundred feet of the grave and watch until midnight, when two would go home, the other two remaining on until dawn. The next night, the two who had gone the previous night would remain until sunrise. This scheme would be carried out for ten consecutive days, unless a discovery were made in less time.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE NEW LOVERS.

Lovers the two New Yorkers became at once, and in all sincerity as they admitted frankly to each other.

They were not hasty in coming to decisions respecting the desirability of Virginia and Flora for wives. They had come to Bonne Terre wholly heart free, so why should they delay trying to secure that which they required to make their existence worth while when they found it within reach?

Accordingly they began laying plans for the future. The affairs had started in pleasant pastime —merely sought as a pleasant pastime to occupy them while waiting for decisive steps in the mining situation. But after the second meeting all thoughts of makeshift and pastime vanished. The young men became serious and gradually less communicative with each other about their progress. They called on the young ladies, separately, of course, and on meeting again at the Inn, said they

passed an enjoyable evening, or made some commonplace remark about something that had happened during their visit. Malinda, for instance, was a constant source of amusement to Sam Bolivar, and he felt a strange fascination as he watched her roll her eyes wondering the while what she meant by shaking her head at him so knowingly. He asked Flora but the girl looked embarrassed and declared she did not know. The fact was that Malinda was as much interested in Sam's visits as he was himself and she spent many hours imagining her young mistress at the head of an establishment in New York wondering what it would be like—herself the boss of numerous servants.

The white-haired Obediah had orders from Malinda to hold himself at the beck and call of the young millionaire. To her simple mind a "millionaire" was about as hazy a person as a fairy or genius of some time, but what she did know is that they can always "do" things.

"Shucks, he haint nuthin' to Marse Bud and the Cap'n," said Obediah at first, but after a couple of shining dollars were slipped into his palm he changed his tune, though at heart he felt a little sore—that his friends couldn't do as much.

Occasionally Ryan and Virginia were seen driv-

ing out alone, and Bolivar and Flora would take an opposite direction. It was evident that the young men had personal problems to work out, and privacy was essential to their furthering their cause.

When the proposals were made they were received in such a way that the lovers went about for some time with the feeling that their hearts were held as hostages. For whom?—they wondered. No one had seemed to dispute the rights they had assumed.

The morning of the succeeding day, Virginia remained in her room, under the pretext of writing letters, when as a matter of fact, her thoughts were occupied endeavoring to solve questions of great moment to her in the years to come. She was wishing one minute she had never set eyes on Henry Ryan, though the next she acknowledged him to be a most estimable man, quite worthy of her confidence and friendship, also of any good woman's love. It was the latter that troubled her. No sane, intelligent woman could help appreciating Ryan's sterling qualities. While floundering and stumbling in her worries, Flora knocked at the door.

There was no mistaking her rap, besides she had heard her rapid, lively ascent of the stairs.

"Flora!"

"Virginia!" and the friends clasped each other, then held each other at arm's length, looking searchingly into eyes that seemed burning with unusual excitement.

"You needn't tell me, Virgie. I can read it as plainly as if it were written in black and white: we're in the same predicament!"

"I don't quite understand," murmured Virginia trying hard to keep her secret.

"Virgie!" cried Flora reproachfully, "how can you say that when you know better. Oh! Heavens! I never was in such a dilemma! What are we going to do?"

"Then you did not give a positive answer, Flora?"

"Of course not, and neither did you. I bet that's what you were worrying about when I came in. And such lovely men, Virgie! Did you ever see anyone with more expressive eyes than Mr. Bolivar?"

"Well, it's no use holding back, Flora, since you guessed so correctly. Mr. Ryan did me the honor of asking me to marry him and I said 'No.' When I say the 'honor' I mean it for I never met such a fine man but one."

"And?"

"And that is Captain François. But Flora, Mr. Ryan would not take my answer as final and asked for permission to speak again. I consented. I am sorry for I mean to refuse him again."

"Virgie, I can't advise you. Some months ago I would have fought for the Captain, but he's been acting so strangely of late that—, that—."

"Yes, my dear, he acts very strangely. I do not understand him, only I do understand my heart, Flora, and I love Captain François. It's no use deceiving myself—"

"But you once thought you loved Dan Douglas—"

"Flora, leave him out. When I think of the narrow escape I've had, I come near losing my mind."

"Then why did you consent to let Mr. Ryan address you again on the subject? Is it fair to him?"

"It is not, Flora, but he persuaded me or rather left me no chance of refusing. I am only puzzling and worrying over the way I'm to handle the situation. Mr. Ryan is a fine man and I like him very much, but—, however, let us talk of you. What have you decided?"

"When I said 'No,' he said he didn't want his answer yet, he would call for it in a few days. In

the meantime what are we to do? If they insist in continuing to be so perfectly lovely I don't know what they might induce us to say and then—" she continued:

"Yes, and then we would be miserable all the rest of our lives. We must stop them while there is yet time. But, Virgie, how did you know I care for Bud?"

"You could not help it, Flora. Who, taking the slightest interest, could remain indifferent to the wonderful change that has come over him? And has he not done all his studying with one fixed motive: to become worthy of you?"

"And, Virgie, do you think he has felt hurt because I've been going about with Mr. Bolivar?" Flora's face became a study in anxiety. "And what about Captain François? Oh! I'm afraid we have both been very wicked!"

"No, Flora."

"I think I guess what you would say: they need a lesson. And, Virgie, it is up to us to give it to them, only we must not let those two young men suffer for it and we must not allow them to speak to us again on the subject. But how in the name of goodness are we to prevent them? If Mr. Ryan is as persistent as Mr. Bolivar, I can sympathize

with you, Virgie," and Flora gave a sigh that emphasized her words.

So, they talked for more than two hours, commenting on the virtues and qualities of the rival lovers—if lovers Bud and François could be termed in the precise sense of the word.

Any worldly or even strictly practical person would not have lost one minute in hesitating but would have accepted at once the two New Yorkers, who, besides sterling qualities of mind and heart possessed an abundant share of worldly goods; but our friends, Virginia and Flora, alas! were neither worldly nor practical, and oh! the tricks of love-entanglements! Quite easy for outsiders to prescribe in such cases, but how can a poor mortal suffering from that peculiar paralysis of the powers of reasoning which is the direct result of love, decide as would an immune? Strange that the decisions which should be guided by intelligence should be at the mercy of chance and emotional inspiration! But so it has always been and always shall be. Virginia and Flora were, however, not insensible to the advantages of wealth and position and their merits received a great share in their discussion. But Love won out above all considerations, although they talked at times like professors delivering a lecture. Had

they been ever so much wiser the result would have been the same. What theories and carefully laid schemes are proof against that master passion, which goes so far as to mock decorum and rules of society, making thrones tremble and moving the sacredness of peasant traditions? What laws are safe from the freaks of love? What government has greater power? Again, how speak lightly of that which in its highest perfection is the scepter of the Almighty with which he governs and dominates the universe with its myriads of worlds!

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE SILENT WATCH.

Even those who deny the supernatural are often at a loss to explain away certain experiences. For the same reason the at-one-time incomprehensible phenomena of nature gave rise to numberless myths and legends. It is, therefore, not so very remarkable that the mystic cycle that spans the space and interval between the end of this world and the beginning of another, should be peopled with specters and ghosts which, like fairies and hobgoblins, figure in myths, speculations, and prophesies sufficient to satisfy the fancies of every imaginative mortal.

Hence, it is not extraordinary that the sparsely populated village of Bonne Terre should be impressed by the report of supernatural phenomena at the graves of Paul and Helen François, and that as a result the inhabitants should shrink from the spot.

Property nearest the briar-hidden tomb was cheapest and every block away the price of build-

ing lots increased. Adults, children, believers, and non-believers, also,—for glimpses of the unknown puzzle the wise as well as the ignorant—preferred to pass on the other side. Children could not be bribed to gather berries and nuts within a quarter of a mile of the place. So the result was that the immediate neighborhood of the graves was completely isolated and left to the ruthless hand of ugliness to raise up patches of brambles and screens of scrubby brush over its face. On returning home after his absence of ten years, it will be remembered that François had built a wall around his parents' resting place, then after the war when he came back and found his cabin burned and the spot overgrown with shrubs and brush, he decided that in view of the rumors going about, it was advisable to let the graves and vicinity remain as he had found them.

Therefore, it was without fear of molestation and intrusion that François, Silas, Bud, and Father Duncan undertook their silent watch to intercept the "ghost", either in his inward or outward journey and locate his place of exit or entrance. Perhaps no quartette of men in all the country around, had, up to that time, taken upon themselves so unpromising a venture, but that possi-

bility did not trouble the picket in assuming their duties on the hillside.

By day, François and Bud had gone and arranged vantage concealments for the four. Then a meeting was held on the ground and a system of signals agreed upon, said signals suitable for moonlight or total darkness. A plan of action was also fixed, so that should a form appear within the walled-in enclosure, on the grave, or else approach it from without, the watchers would rush forward and seize the object, be it spirit or flesh.

As it was full-moon time, it was thought very favorable for the experience.

Shortly after dusk the first night, the four men crept up singly and took positions in the thicket, each within a furlong of the grave. Then the hours dragged, for no whispered communication was allowed.

Perfect stillness magnified the slightest noises, such as breathing which though audible only to its author sounded like the wheezings of leaky bellows, and the sighings of the great oaks, at intervals when the wind whispered to them that they must soon give up their autumn-browned leaves already brittled and seared, caused creepy sensations to shoot through the watchers' spines. They listened with awe to the tumbling to earth

of a ripened acorn anxious to plant itself in the turf and become possibly a young tree in the next spring. When a great owl swooped down and alighted on the boughs nearby, crying his dismal "Whoo! To-whoo!" the four crouched a little lower instinctively. A bald-faced calf straying about the trap, was mistaken by Silas for the ghost and before his companions could check him the old fellow pounced upon the innocent intruder and it bellowed so that they feared the village might be aroused. Silas, disgusted that he should be the first and only one to forget the strict disciplinary orders, vented his feelings by crying:

"Why don't ye git out of here, yer dumgasted fool!" and he pursued him up the hill.

Father Duncan laughed for ten minutes before he could check himself, and as his laughter was as a rule contagious, the organization ran great risks of becoming demoralized. Silas was for returning home, but the others would not consent. The watch must be kept. A half hour after the four had readjusted themselves to solitude and quiet, the reverend father happened to look Silas's way and a snicker again provoked pandemonium. As it was nearly time for Dade and the priest to leave they went home leaving the two younger men.

Daylight returned without Bud or François observing anything uncanny or startling.

The following night the watch was resumed with a much more settled, calculated purpose. Whereas the previous time they, in spite of themselves, had their nerves keyed up to the point of snapping, and the faintest suggestions of a rustle produced tremors unknown to them before, the second attempt was begun with a cool deliberateness sufficient to defy a dozen phantoms. They undertook to disprove that which they knew to be false. If they watched for a fortnight without detecting any manifestation of man or ghost, they could certify that the charge was unfounded. If on the other hand a discovery were made they were men who would be able to explain it to everyone's satisfaction.

Again the hours wore away heavily until almost twelve o'clock. No levity interposed to break the monotony. The four men patiently waited at their posts, ready to spring upon and intercept any intruder who might appear to mar the peace of the resting-place of the dead.

Little did they suspect that not only their strength but their pluck would be put to test that night. Just before twelve, when the silvery flood from midheaven fell full onto the grave and the

stolid chimney, there broke upon the ears of the listeners a grating, grinding sound not unlike the edging together of two millstones. At once a tremor shot through the men's bodies!

The grinding, creaking noise continued for a half minute, and then there was a jarring, snap as of the breaking of a rusty hinge! Involuntarily the four men sprang to their feet and listened. It was as light as day and though they could see perfectly they strained their eyes towards the area enclosed by the stone wall. Absolute silence reigned for a few seconds. They leaned forward prepared to run and grab whatever might appear over the wall. Instead of seeing a form, they heard a faint moan, then other and more distinct groans!

François moved forward. With beating hearts the others joined him and all four rushed to the enclosed spot and looked over the wall. As they did so, a voice cried:

"He-lp! help!"

Excitement paralyzed the men in spite of their eagerness to discover the cause and the author of the cries. When they did see, they thought their eyes deceived them: the hearthstone, the huge single block before what they had always believed was a fireplace, was tilted down next to the chimney, and the form of a man was struggling to

crawl from under the raised outer side! With dilated eyes they gazed at each other then again and again at the semblance of a man writhing as if in agony. They were too stupefied to move.

Once more the dark mass cried for help.

"Quick—before I die!"

All fear left them. The watchers saw they had to deal with flesh and blood. Four pairs of hands laid hold of the great block and shifted its weight off the crushed man. It taxed their combined strength to raise the stone and balance it on its broken pivot and they had almost succeeded but as they pushed it upright it slipped and fell into a yawning hole, nearly dragging old Silas and Father Duncan with it.

"Carry me to the bed below," the suffering man said with great effort.

"Bud, light your lantern quickly and come." The watchers had regained their usual alertness and presence of mind.

Two lanterns were brought and the frail body of an old dwarfed man was gently borne down a flight of wide stone steps, and then on down a steep inclined passage for more than two hundred feet to another stairway. They descended twenty odd steps more, according to the stranger's instructions, interrupted by moans as he writhed

with pain, and reached a lower level that sloped with a steep incline. Along this passage the procession moved cautiously for a considerable distance till the old man finally commanded them to turn sharply to the left. They did as told and entered a sort of hallway branching off the main passage. A short distance further on, they saw the glimmer of a light and soon they walked into a subterranean chamber fitted up as a bedroom. It contained a table supporting a lighted lamp, two chairs made of rough wood, some boxes, a crude mantel with a clock on it, and a camping bed next to the wall.

On this they laid their burden and then stood about and looked at him more carefully than they had yet had a chance to do.

"Ah! it's you, Sam! I'd know you anywhere, Sam," exclaimed Dade.

"Yes, Si, but th—is is the last of Sam Hil—Hil—derbrand!" gasped the sufferer.

"Where are you hurt?" asked Captain François. "Never mind, I see, it's your chest," he added noticing Sam's hand that was pressed to it.

Father Duncan assisted in unfastening Sam's shirt. "He must be suffering agonizing pain. See his pallor even in this dim light! He looks like a piece of clay."

"He can't last more than a few minutes," said François.

After a pause, seeing that the suffering man rallied somewhat Father Duncan asked: "Is there anything you wish us to do for you?"

"Yes; when I'm dead, take my body to Jake Hollow—bury it—in the little cemetery by the crooked oaks."

They all knew the place he meant and united with Father Duncan in giving an affirmative reply.

It was evident that the famous "bushwhacker" was dying. He shuddered occasionally, probably when he considered the journey near at hand—so thought those looking on who were all acquainted with the man's history.

Suddenly an expression of fear spread over his countenance. He tried to speak but weakness prevented him.

"He will die hard," murmured Silas.

"Do not be afraid, Hilderbrand," said Father Duncan, "we will stay with you until the end, and you can die in peace if you only will."

A look of surprise overspread his face.

"Do you believe in God?" asked the priest.

It was several minutes before the answer came

and when it did come the men instinctively drew back.

"Yes, in the God of revenge!" and a new strength seemed to have been instilled in the frail body. Probably the memory of his dark deeds sent the blood coursing through his veins with greater vigor. "He has permitted me to punish my enemies. As for your God He would not understand but would only count it as murder. Entreat Him not for me. He said: 'Vengeance is mine'—Let Him mete out to me the full measure of His wrath. Ah! but I've glutted my soul to the full—yes to the full! And in fear of no man have I lived. Do you believe that at Death's door, I will become a cringing hypocrite?" He stopped from exhaustion.

Father Duncan said not a word, neither did his companions. Then every word they had heard about Sam Hilderbrand was true. In his thirst for vengeance he had not stopped at his enemies but had been guilty of multiplied murders—and in cold blood, too. Here on his deathbed he gloated over the recollection of deeds of unparralleled cruelty.

"Ah! but the world's been hard on him, you must remember," said Si, as a sort of apology.

Those about paid no attention to the remark,

but the words were not lost on Sam and he looked up at Dade, a ray of gratitude shining in his almost glassy eyes.

Father Duncan noted the expression and knelt at the bedside to pray.

Sam spoke in a somewhat gentler voice:

"Thank you, but let me pass out as I have lived —a dripping dagger, a firebrand. What is to be will be; God is just. I am not prepared to die as you would have me but I'm ready."

There was such finality in his words that even Father Duncan forebore from pressing him, but a prayer was sent heavenward just the same; then the good man arose and stood by his companions.

Sam tried to speak but pain prevented him. He shook in a paroxysm of agony for a long time. Silas, of the four men present, was the one who seemed most affected by the scene and he walked up and down the narrow space tugging away at his beard.

When the suffering abated Sam spoke again:

"I have a request to make. There, in the corner, is my rifle, 'Kill Devil', put it in the grave with me."

François asked:

"Did you know my father, Paul François?"

"Ah! the one in the grave at the top?—yes, but only in passing."

"How did you happen to find this underground place?"

"By accident—soldiers were after me. I ran—and—hid in the briars about this place. I lay on my stomach on the ground—in front of the stone hearth. After the soldiers went away I sat on the great stone and because it looked so large and appeared to be so heavy I examined it. It was carefully hewn. My eyes fell on a round hole in the middle of the outer edge, and just to pass the time I kept jabbing a stick down in the hole."

"And?" but François received no answer. Sam had spoken with great difficulty and finally stopped for want of breath. By the time he recovered somewhat he seemed to have forgotten what he had been saying.

"You have only to examine the stone to get your clue to the situation," said Father Duncan to François. "The hearthstone is the entrance to a natural cave or passage leading to one. It must have been fitted up with weights and has a trap catch or combination in the front. Strange you never saw your father at work on it. Did you never suspect its existence?"

"Never."

"Was the stone there when you left home the first time?"

"Yes." After a while François continued:

"I wish I knew who brought these things down here?"

"I did," answered the dying man.

"Did you arrange the entrance and the steps?"

"No."

"There are many of these subterranean passages in this country," explained Father Duncan. "Over on the Brenan farm there's one that extends underground for a good half mile."

"I've come across some in the hills," said Bud. "In Joplin, three hundred miles from here, I've seen several caves."

"But this is much smaller than the other caves in the neighborhood," interposed François, "and it sems to be only a passage—I wonder if we could find any chambers. You could scarcely call this one." He felt the walls: "everything seems dry, and that can only be where there is circulation of air. I wonder where the air comes from."

Father Duncan leaned over Sam and asked:

"Have you found the other opening? There must be one."

Hilderbrand signified he had not.

"How strange it is," murmured François, "I

wonder what Father had in mind when he made that odd door at the mouth."

Hilderbrand's eyes were fixed on François.

"You say you are the son of the man in the grave up yonder? His name, his given name was Paul, what's yours?"

At this unexpected question François quivered with excitement.

"Jean François," he answered, and kneeling down at the side of the bed in order not to miss a sound he asked: "Think well, have you anything to tell me? Have you ever found anything?"

"Jean? ah! it is clear to me now. On the walls —in passage I saw that name carved—four times —in the rock. There is an arrow pointing. Look by that small opening—in the wall there. See the letters 'J. F.'" The sufferer seemed no longer in pain, only a great feebleness required great effort on his part to talk at all.

François had arisen and examined the wall.

"Yes," he said after satisfying himself that the letters were indeed there.

"I crawled down for—one hundred and more feet. Then the passage widens to—a flat crevice twenty or thirty feet across. The overhead hangs so low I could not crawl further. But with a light I could see a long way off. The opening must

be that—side at the end. The floor of this slit in the earth—" he gasped for breath and seemed to forget, so mixed up were his words: "slit earth —floor—all over, yes—all over—floor—" then he stopped short and was silent for more than a minute before ending: "almost solid—lead."

A murmured exclamation burst simultaneously from the lips of the bystanders.

They strained their ears to catch the slightest whisper from Sam. Father Duncan by a gesture signified that the end was near and was about to kneel when Hilderbrand rallied perceptibly and continued: "Your father must—have discovered a mine—and kept it—for you. I was afraid I could not—live much longer so I wrote a letter and was going to—mail it when the stone—"

Silas could keep silent no longer:

"Jist like your Dad, Cap'n. He didn't care for it hisself. I see now why he was so 'xact 'bout where his grave should be dug. Howamsoiver—"

"Sh—" cried François.

"You've all been kind to me." Hilderbrand spoke in an altered voice· "I can't see any more, all is dark—dark! Hold me, I'm falling. Don't forget—Kill Devil. I know you won't—when I'm gone. I, also, want to—warn you—about this—place. It looks all right—but it isn't. Look out—"

The little scrawny man stretched out and closed his eyes.

All remained silent for a while. Life was not yet extinct—the only sign was a very slight sound as the air was puffed out spasmodically from two pallid lips.

So intently did the watchers observe the dying man's breathing that they were like men startled from heavy sleep when Hilderbrand suddenly raised himself on an elbow and cried:

"Quick!—give me—give me Kill Devil. I must —make one more notch!" He fell back as unexpectedly as he had risen and a terrible convulsion shook his frame; then he lay rigid. He was dead.

"I told ye he'd die hard," murmured Dade.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A NEW OUTLOOK.

THE four men grouped about the rough bed remained motionless for several minutes.

"He is gone," said Father Duncan simply, and kneeling he offered a prayer. François knelt while Silas and Bud listened with bowed heads.

After a short consultation it was thought advisable not to admit the curious public into the subterranean passage. Still, the exploding of the ghost story must be given in such a manner as to satisfy everybody, and the details of Hilderbrand's death should not lead to an investigation of the cave. Silas suggested that the body be carried to the mouth of the passage and left on the steps until he could go about and summon three or four of the village people. In the meantime his three companions would disappear and come in with some of the neighbors. It would not be possible to conceal the existence of the passage, otherwise how explain the supposed ghost?

"So, while we are here," suggested Bud, "we

may as well investigate the mine. There is nothing we can do for the dead man—it is too early to call in anyone."

They agreed upon this, and Captain François with lantern in hand led the way, entering the hole in the wall and proceeding on all fours. The other followed in this order: Bud, Father Duncan, and Silas.

Progress was slow. The floor of the narrow lead presented many difficulties in the way of sharp, cone-shaped stones which cut into hands and knees, and at some places the closing down of the overhead made advance extremely difficult, almost impossible. Especially was this the case with Father Duncan who was the possessor of a goodly amount of fat, and sandwiched as he was between Bud and Silas he could not turn back, nor be left behind. Thus on and on they crawled until they came to the widening of the wat just as Hilderbrand had described it.

Not only did the passage, the whole distance from the entrance, slope perceptibly to the chamber, but the explorers had been crawling downward since entering the small tunnel. Upon reaching the widened part and seeing no elevation in the ceiling, a depressing feeling stole over them, a feeling that suggested to them most potently

that they were far into the earth—far from the free air on top where trees grow and man rests content. A shudder shook their frames, and when they spoke, their voices sounded flat and metallic.

"It never occurred to me we were going so far below the surface," said François, starting the conversation now they were going forward and abreast, he and Bud setting the two lanterns an arm's length as they went.

"Neither I, Captain. My holy orders have called me to many parts of the earth, but never in its interior," replied Father Duncan.

"This here thing gives me the creeps," put in Dade, "I can't say as I'm hankerin' after many of these expeditions."

Bud said nothing.

During the next few minutes all that could be heard was the dragging sound made by the crawlers and the clicks of the tin lanterns as they were moved forward on the rock bottom.

Presently Dade spoke again:

"Fellers, I haint saying I'm superstitious or chickenhearted, but don't forgit that Sam warned us back yonder against sunthin' or other. It's pesterin' me a little. This 'd be a bum awkward pigeon for a calamity to befall us in. Begosh!"

From the beginning the whole affair had presumed on good steady nerves, but there was such a thing as getting off into a panicky zone. What Dade said was not a laughing matter, as afterwards developed, neither did any one smile at the time he spoke.

François finally said:

"True, Uncle Si, but you must remember the poor fellow was delirious. That would account for almost anything he said."

"Tut! tut! his mind was clear enough. So far haint everything turned out as he said?"

"Did he know what he was saying when he addressed his last words to his rifle?"

"Sure he did, for every notch in that rifle stood for a life taken. So you see, Cap'n, that don't prove nuthin' ", and Dade after muttering to himself a little while longer lapsed into silence.

They continued forward until they came to a wide flat horizontal opening thirty or forty feet from side to side, and less than three feet high.

"There it is!" cried François. "We have it—the vein of lead!"

It was so,—a vein of rich lead disseminated in rock, some of it a softwhite rock which Dade called "tiff." They scrambled along as far as the gradual narrowing of the slit would permit, and the ex-

posed part of the vein of ore continued—it seemed to be endless.

Each in the party broke off specimens of the lead ore, also rock and lead and tiff, using the heels of their boots. They filled their coat and trouser pockets.

This, indeed, was the great mine for which the Syndicate had been delving for months, and the mine the engineers had theorized about for a quarter of a century—ever since pocket lead was first discovered. The men recalled these things as they lay there, flat on their stomachs, and remarked on the surprise in store for the organization—when they learned of the hidden treasure. Bud recalled an old tradition about the discovery of a great mine that was exposed in one of the numerous caves in Missouri. Uncle Aubuchon had once told him the story which ran that a chieftain of the Kaws had offered to take Louis Choutou, of St. Louis, to the cave that contained the mine—a lead mine—for the reward of two barrels of whiskey.

After walking across wild country for several days and enjoying a series of adventures, the chieftain was taken captive by a band of hostile Indians, and Louis Choutou barely escaped with his life. It was thought the Indian played a trick on the White Man—the whiskey having been paid in

advance—and that the attack was planned by confederates of the Chieftain after the latter had tried in vain to weary his fellow traveler by taking him through a veritable labyrinth of forest trails.

Now the lead mine was found—Paul François must have come upon it by chance—probably after François left home.

After examining the rough diagrams and sketches made then and there, Bud and François concluded they were approaching the neighborhood of the main shaft, on which they had been at work recently, the shaft known as Bonne Terre No. 1. They also concluded that the main lode upon which they then reposed, must be from two hundred twenty-five to two hundred fifty feet below surface.

While still speculating on the wonderful discovery and its potentialities, they turned back to retrace the tunnel. For half an hour they searched vainly for the way out. Weary from dragging himself about over the irregular rocks, poor old Dade was exhausted, the four men huddled together and stared at each other in amazement. François was positive the crude map he and Bud had drawn represented the location as far as the surface was concerned, but since turning hither and thither so often, he was afraid they had lost their

bearing as far as the exit was concerned. Of one thing they were certain, it was there, and they must creep upward. After the incidents of the night and the warning that Dade again reminded them of in forcible terms, their present predicament drove them frantic.

"We got here, we must get out!" repeated Bud over and over.

"There's no use in getting excited, of course we'll get out!" said François.

"Can't you two young men go ahead and find the opening?" Father Duncan was puffing heavily. "I shouldn't mind if only we could walk about instead of crawling."

"I admit it's a purty tight place for you, Father, an' I've been a-wonderin' how you stood out so long. You kin hold your own with those boys, all right."

A low sigh was the answer.

Captain François diverted the attention from Father Duncan by exclaiming:

"I feel a draft!"

"That's nuthin' new!" answered Silas, "I've been a-feelin' it long ago. It only makes this here place feel all the creepier."

"Ah! I have it, nevertheless!" retorted Fran-

çois. "We commented on the influx of fresh air. It comes in from this part."

"Well?" asked his companions in one voice.

François did not reply, but he drew out his pipe, filled it and lit it.

"Now we will follow the smoke." The puffs of smoke which he emitted floated away in front of him.

Dade called out merrily:

"Smoke up, Cap'n! I always did say smokin' has saved lots of fellers from one thin' or tuther. This is one of the 'tuther' things. 'Igh Jinks! keep it up, I say, 't will save us."

It did. Soon afterwards the small tunnel was found, and François leading the advance while he smoked furiously shouted that he could see the steady gleam of the light they had left near Hilderbrand's room. A few more yards traversed on hands and knees brought them through the hole in the wall and into the death chamber.

"Now, Uncle Si, you carry both lanterns and 'Kill Devil', and we will carry Hilderbrand's body to the mouth of the cave or passage."

The procession moved out of the gloomy cavern. There could be no harm in permitting the lamp to burn on, so they abandoned it to sap out its own existence. On reaching the top once more they

laid the lifeless form upon the grass—that being thought the best way—and stood looking at it as if fascinated.

Already the approach of day reddened the eastern sky, and several flues, down in the village, fogged roofs with clouds of whitish smoke. Early risers were astir. It was well for the watchers that at this time of the year especially, no one needed nor cared to venture near the grave at this early hour. In a very short while stragglers would be seen in the streets, and busy housewives would be hustling to Dade's Store.

The plans were slightly revised: Dade hurried to his Store and the other three men simply went away in different directions.

Dade started a fire in his place—just enough to send a column of smoke through the chimney. After that was done, he judged that a sufficient number of the village people were up and busy, so he ran in the direction of the grave. Two of the up-and-abouts saw him and wondered. A quarter of an hour later, he came towards the village in great haste. On meeting a man he cried:

"The ghost at the grave is dead. Call everybody quick, an accident must have overtook him!"

The alarm was given and brought out excited men and women and, bare-headed and wild-eyed,

they collected about old Silas and listened to his story.

"The ghost? Who said 't was a ghost? It's jist an oldish chap who took a fancy to livin' in a cave. I was comin' this way jist a while ago when I heerd him moan, so I run an' found him crushed by a rock which had cove in an' killed him. I pulled him out, an' now jist come an' see, maybe someone knows him."

François and Bud joined the rapidly increasing throng. Even Father Duncan was there in time to hear Silas repeat the story for the fourth time. Flora and her mother, Malinda and Obediah, came up closely followed by Virginia and Mrs. Bardsdell—in fact three-fourths of the population of Bonne Terre were grouped in the street.

"Come!" called out Dade, and the curious crowd stepped behind him at a lively pace. No one returned home for a hat or bonnet, not even prim Mrs. Birsch. Several women wore wrappers and heavy coats. Men's shoes were not laced nor did they wear collars and ties. As they went they plied Dade with questions.

"How can I answer you? 'Twarn't no ghost. Years an' years back when the people about here, them that was here before your time, said they saw a ghost I told them not to put truck in no sich

flum-gasterin' stuff! Ghosts, ha! ha! Who ever seen a ghost? As you'ns 'll see soon 'nough, this was some fool of a hermit what hasn't had no better sense than to hide underground an' make a lot of waggin' tongues wag!

"Who is he? some relation of Paul François? What ever puts that in yer heads? He haint no sich thing! Old Paul and Helen, too, never had relations! When they both stands before you and those that's gone from these parts, in Kingdom Come, ye'll have a divil of a time 'splaining an 'pologizin' to them, that all I've got to say. But I won't 'cause I never believed in Ghosts. Believe me! Si Dade haint one of your gabblers and trembly-kneed superstitionists!"

Fortunately Silas was a privileged person in Bonne Terre. That morning he looked like a semi-ancient patriarch as he led his flock through brambles and almost impossible-to-pass-through branches of scrub oak tangled up in places with vines.

It now required but a few minutes of running and plucking of skirts from briars to bring the crowd to the lone chimney and walled-in grave. When they rushed up to look over the wall their faces were pale and an expression of horror stole over their features as they gazed on the stark

corpse of the small gray-bearded man that lay on the sward, hands folded over his breast, eyes half open. The bosom of his hickory shirt was soaked with blood.

The yawning mouth of the cave, with the covering and the hearth-stone now resting athwart the entrance, verified Dade's story of death by accident. These details were taken in at a glance. Then the crowd drew back aghast.

Dade, the man of the hour, addressed them:

"Nigh unto ten years ago, with two or three I now see—their heads bowed and nearly white, an' with more 'n three hundred others from the woods here abouts an' yonder from the loneliness of the hills, I stood on this spot an' spoke at the funeral of Paul an' Helen François.

"But how different it looks now! Then the cracklin' flames, the deceased funeral pile from ch'ice, lighted up a dense wilderness that warn't this here Bonne Terre of these times. Again, then 't was the close of a wintry day with snow all around, 't was the gatherin' of the old backwoodsmen to witness the endin' out of which a new place was to spring. I passes over the intervening time when the War come like a scourge though during those times there hung over the mem'ry of the best friends we old-timers ever had, the story of a ghost

which we now see haint a ghost at all, jist a piece, a bit of clay with no semblance whatsoiver to Paul François.

"Now, it's all changed. 'Tis the beginning of a day instead of the close and new faces looks up at me, old Silas Dade, who loves you, his new children, same as the old-timers. Behold a village there on the three hills, and—and a great mine is at hand—mind my words! Modern times have come to us with a leap, I say. Away with superstition and ghosts! The accidental death of this here old man, whatsoever and whosoever he be knocks the old story of the ghost plum' off its base. See here it goes with the last of him. Who built that chimney and for what purpose was that huge hearthstone place there? Ah! my frien's that will soon appear. Yes, I answer the question in yer eyes, Paul François placed them there, that is all I'll say now.

"As I've been a-sayin' the old has passed away. A new outlook is at hand. Today we'll all go to the little cemetery an' put him away," Silas pointed dramatically to the corpse—"up yonder on the hillside, that 'll be the end. To-morry ye'll set yer faces towards the new and forgit all 'bout the old."

Father Duncan and François assisted by Bud gently lifted the form of Sam Hilderbrand over

the wall, and the groups of impressed people bowed their heads while a crude stretcher was improvised with poles and some pieces of board. Gradually the preparations interested the crowd and they all looked on, preparatory to accompanying the body to the village where it was announced it would be laid out as became the age of the hermit—no one suspected the dead man to be Sam Hilderbrand.

While almost complete silence reigned there broke upon the ears of the spectators a growling, fiercely muffled report like the boom of heavy thunder at sea. All thought of the cave—the sound gurgled out from its throat! Immediately an overlaying slice of soil and rock, evidently the full length of the passage, loosened by the blasting in the mine, tumbled in, completely choking the great cavity. Then a gust of dust laden air puffed out of the trembling earth and the old stone chimney shook violently and crumbled in ruins!

CHAPTER XXXVII.

LOYALTY.

TONGUES were most vigorously set agog by the events surrounding the discovery of the cave, the "ghost man," and his death and burial. Many theories accounted for the existence of the subterranean passage and as many for the reasons the "individual" had to warrant his hiding there—probably a fugitive from justice from distant parts; no one guessed he was Hilderbrand. However, on returning from the hillside cemetery where the unidentified body was covered over with red clay—"Kill Devil" having been smuggled in the grave before the crowd assembled—the talk waned, and soon the folk of Bonne Terre became absorbed in affairs of home and business. The thing of prime interest was the future of the mines. If they suceeded all would be well. As for the ghost, a story more or less after all counted but little: all must give way before the hopes for the morrow.

The night following the clearing up of the grave

mystery old Basil called at the Inn and asked for François.

The old Frenchman had discarded his buckskin apparel and wore citizen's clothing. He carried a portmanteau. A joyful smile illumined his deeply furrowed features and his eyes in place of their accustomed piercing, alert expression wore a look of faraway absentmindedness as regarded the present. The sight of the traveling bag suggested preoccupied anticipation of a long journey which excited him subconsciously giving him the appearance of a changed man.

"What is the meaning of all this?" asked François looking over his friend.

"I'm going home!" exclaimed Basil. "Leaving in the morning."

"Home? Going home? What do you mean?"

But Basil did not answer, just smiled and shook his head affirmatively.

"In that case you are going to stay with me until morning."

"No; the man over Elvin's Hill is going to drive me to French Village. We shall reach there at about eleven or twelve. I must see Frank AuBuchon before I go."

"What had decided this sudden departure?"

"The call of my country. Although war has not

been yet declared, to my mind it is a foregone conclusion that within a year war will come on between France and Germany. I want to be there. My country may need me."

"But?"

"Ah! you think me too old? No; my son. Have I given up my daily pursuits? Well, a man becomes too old to serve his country when he becomes tottery and is good for naught else than to sit in the corner near the fireplace. Whoever forgets home is no man.

"When your country needed you, I advised you to go. You went, and you came back as *Mon brave Capitaine,* that testified for your valor. It was proof to me you did your duty. Now I go. Wish me luck. Who knows that on my return you may not have to greet me as a superior officer?" and the old fellow chuckled over his joke.

"Why not?" answered François, "that would not surprise me. In France colonels and generals are always elderly men. Which shall it be?"

So they talked for a while, François deeply touched by Basil's patriotism. He could not forget the land of his birth, and feeling as he did, the old Frenchman could not keep away. He understood and saw a new meaning in the phrase "Love for one's country." Just as he, François, would at

times wander back among the scenes of his childhood while thousands of miles away from Bonne Terre, he realized that the old man, alone in his hermit's cabin, must have done likewise to keep burning the fire that now animated him. Many are kept away from home by circumstances but few are weaned completely from its enchantments.

François walked with Basil over the hill and told him all that had happened during the last few days. To François's surprise Basil said:

"You must be more careful than ever before. I am somewhat afraid for you and wish I could stay to advise you. You need all the help you can get but only confide in tried and trusty friends. You have a few, but keep to those few. By wise management and handling you will come on top."

They were soon over the hill and bade each other an affectionate farewell. François watched Basil go off towards the farmer's home, he was about to turn away when Basil retraced his steps motioning to François to advance likewise.

"Although I feel I shall see you again, I may be mistaken. As I was going just now, a caution your father asked me to enjoin on you came to my mind. I must tell it you before I leave. What he meant by it I do not know, he never liked to be questioned.

"Your father and I hunted much together and although he was several years my senior, he spoke freely to me as to a man of his own age. He spoke incessantly of you, but of his family, himself, his affiliations, his business he spoke not at all. However, one day he said:

" 'If ever Jean comes back, tell him to look carefully to the squatting oak.' That was all, a simple statement enough. No doubt it was a whim, but no matter what it is, I am fulfilling my duty by telling you."

"Thank you, Basil. You are one of two men to whom my father said that. It is curious. What could he have meant? such a stern man could not have had a sentimental motive in saying that."

"Have you ever looked closely at the tree?" asked Basil.

"Not particularly. I played under it when a child. Since then I have always loved it."

"Well, do not expect much, for in passing under it since the caution was entrusted to me I've looked at it carefully, and it seems no different from other trees of its kind. I am only relieving myself of a light burden in shifting it over to you. Humph! he was queer, poor Paul. Think of his strange burial and all the annoyance it caused you!"

"We can forget that now, and, indeed, should I not have cause to rejoice?"

"We shall see! we shall see! It all depends on your handling of the situation."

"Father was an unusual man as I have found out last night and to-day what you say may have a hidden meaning. Imagine, Basil, how strange it seems that I should have lived with him until the age of fifteen and never known of the entrance to the subterranean passage. What of his wonderful and cleverly made hearthstone door? I can scarcely believe I have not dreamed it all."

"You must remember, my son, that it was his love for you that prompted all his strange acts. He wanted to see you a man before he gave you the key to his possessions with their vast possibilities. He wanted you to be a poor man's son until you were brought up through trials and labor to hardihood and self-reliance. How often did he deplore to me his state without ever revealing the cause. It must have been some high sense of honor and duty that kept him silent and his chafing under the restraint only proves the strong will he brought to bear on himself. Do you know that your father possessed all the culture you have often admired in me besides much larger stores of knowledge? To these people in the hills he spoke

the backwoods dialect and he was old Paul but not to his friend Basil. While I deplored, I respected his reticence about his family and his past, and I always saw in him the gentleman and man of principles he was at heart." Basil paused. After a few minutes of meditation as if he were living over the past, he continued:

"Wishing you to be such a man as he had in mind, he pressed you beyond a boy's endurance, and you fled. I am not blaming you. I never have, but you did the right thing when you returned."

He held out his hand.

"Write me to the Chateau d'Armaise, near Rouen."

François again watched the old trapper disappear in the distance, thinking him no less extraordinary than his father. He would miss Basil. He had a stronger hold on François's affection than old Silas by reason of their congeniality, their compatibility. As he mediated one train of thought led on to another and it was quite late when he shook himself free from their entrancement and found himself quite a distance from home. Still it was not yet bedtime so he walked along the path from Elvins Hill to Blue Hill, and then on and on past the scattered stones of the

chimney. "To-morrow, I must come and finish filling up the mouth of the cave and clean up the grave. Now the chimney's down I'll put up a headstone." Then sauntering on, he passed the squatting oak: "I'll inspect you to-morrow, also." One minute he paused and looked at the tree then shrugged his shoulders and continued his way.

Still walking pensively along he came in front of the Birsch home. By the light of the newly-risen moon he recognized Flora and Bolivar on the side veranda. They appeared to be engaged in earnest conversation. A little further on he passed the residence of the Bardsdells and through the parlor window he saw Ryan and Virginia. His heart contracted but he managed to brace up and say: "Humph! those two girls always do the same thing and at the same time. They're most probably listening to the same theme." He walked away quickly.

He was in the humor for talking to himself. When he caught sight of Dade's Store, he remarked half aloud: "What a quaint old man, Uncle Si. Just as unusual in his way and just as wonderful as Basil. I can imagine his feeling just as my old French friend does about his country if he were taken away from here. These backwoods never knew a truer friend than Silas. Pity there

are not more like him. I love him for what he is, his mannerisms, and wise sayings."

But Dade could not overshadow the vision of Virginia, caught as he went by her home and he asked himself the question: "Can I blame her if she accepts all this man has to offer her? Perhaps I should have had more confidence in her, what if she were to be lost to me now? Of what avail would be all the riches of this earth? Still, if she is all that I believe her to be, I have reason to hope that loyalty to earlier associations and love of home and these quiet hills might prevail over the lure of riches and city life as proffered by that man." But by and by a voice mocked him: "What right have you to her?" and all during the night he was pursued by dreams in which the woman he loved became as illusive as a phantom.

Was it the curious workings of telepathy that suggested Virginia to his mind after he tried to divert himself with a studied analysis of old Dade. Perhaps, for he was uppermost in the mind of Virginia, while Bud Dade's strong, stalwart figure was as clearly defined in Flora's.

Precisely at the hour that François strolled past the Birsch and Bardsdell homes, questions likely to make or mar the significance of several lives were being decided.

Flora might have recognized Bud's friend as he went his way had she not been so busily engaged in conversation,—Flora was always heart and soul in everything she said or did.

"I do not doubt your sincerity," she was saying to Sam Bolivar. "In fact I feel you mean all you are saying."

"What a relief! I feared you thought I was trifling with your affection. Because you know we admitted to each other it was all begun in fun—but only the first day, remember!"

"Mr. Bolivar, please let us not talk about that. I really like you so much that it pains me to—"

"I do not wish to pain you," said Sam with earnestness, "but I do entreat you, Miss Flora—"

"No, I cannot permit you. You must take my answer of the other day as final."

"Then why, may I ask, did you consent to let me address you again on the subject. It is because you were not sure of yourself. Whom, may I ask again, have you ever met in this out-of-way place who could affect you in any way?"

"Mr. Bolivar, I consider you have no right to speak like that. It is no affair of yours. There are some very estimable people about here. If you'd look around you would not, no, you would—speak thus." Flora was excited and very nearly

gave away her secret. Her cheeks were flushed and even the faint light of the moon showed the darkening of her eyes. She arose and walked to the farther end of the veranda. Bolivar lost no time but followed her, new tactics urging him onward.

"Perhaps you do not care to live East? I see you are attached to this place. Well, since you are I'm sure there must be innumerable attractions about, beautiful scenery—further up in the hills and lovely people living in rustic simplicity. You must be patient and teach me. In no time I can learn to see with your eyes."

Flora was obliged to laugh. All her anger disappeared and she smiled most indulgently on her admirer. His courage revived.

"There seems to be something so satisfying about this little village. Ever since I've been here —I feel I belong here."

"I'm not a native of this *town*. St. Louis is really my home. No, no," she quickly interrupted what she knew would be a veritable avalanche of praise for St. Louis, "I mean my old home."

"Well, as I was saying to my friend Ryan, I see no reason for me to live out East. Some people will be required to remain on this spot—I'm sure

this fellow François will soon compromise—and why shouldn't I be one of those who stay?"

"I see no reason. But you are again mistaking my feelings as far as the East is concerned. I have nothing against the East."

His eyes lit up.

"I'm sure you are sensible and would like me to speak openly on the subject. I know I permitted you to think I might listen to you, but I apologize from the bottom of my heart—"

"Miss Birsch, will you frankly answer my question? It is not what you think—Yes? Then if you are not engaged why can you not love me instead of some man you know nothing about now and who is wasting precious minutes by roaming about the world? Here I am ready to love you and do your smallest bidding. I'm not asking you again to marry me I just would like to know why you can't?"

Just then Malinda poked her head through the door:

"Miss Flora, honey, here's a shawl, let me wrap it 'round you."

"Damn that nigger!" cried Bolivar to himself, "I think she's been standing there all the while!"

"Sho, Miss Flora, that's your chance, ah says so to Obediah 'very day. We'ze got more silver dol-

lars stored away since he's come here than in ten years afore his comin'. He's your chance!"

Flora managed to push Malinda indoors and got a hand firmly fixed over her mouth, but the darkey got her say. Flora took the shawl off and arranged its folds to suit herself—really to gain time. She meant her refusal to be irrevocable.

Ryan's pleading was long and sustained. Virginia sat opposite him at a center table on which a large lamp cast upon them the full glare of its light. She admitted to herself that never before had she listened to such nearly-convincing arguments as he put forth to gain his cause, but she punctuated his climax with a definite No. The intellectual looking young man looked at her with wide, calm eyes. He was baffled and stunned. In all things he had always won. Was it possible that this girl, village bred, he thought, could refuse to marry him? One minute the blood rushed to his head and the shame of defeat caused him to bite his lips.

Virginia saw the look and was chagrined that her refusal should cause him such pain and humiliation. She was planning to bring about a diversion in the conversation when Ryan flung at her the hackneyed accusation: "There's someone else that you love!"

The young woman raised her head with spirit:

"I consider you are falling from your high standard of fairness and gentlemanly honor, Mr. Ryan. You've admitted to me a while ago that since meeting you I have done and said nothing to warrant your assuming I cared for you otherwise than a pleasant acquaintance. When I say No to your proposal, giving as my reason that I do not care for you as I should for the man I marry, but that on the other hand I esteem you worthy of any woman's confidence and affection, you should not inquire further."

The young man winced under the reprimand, flushed, and hastened to apologize.

"Before I accept apologies, and that you may not be in doubt as to the finality of my answer, Mr. Ryan," her voice became low and sweet, and her rare individuality shone in her eyes, "Yes. I admit that you are right, there is another whom I love with all the strength of mind and heart I possess, but I am not engaged. It may be that I shall never be nearer to him than I am at present. Beyond that you should not care to know, only, I evidently made a mistake in assuming that my love for one man precluded my extending my friendship to another."

The rebuke was not lost upon Ryan. He accepted his rejection without further insistence.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE CLEARING OF THE WAY.

THERE was a snapping of burning briars in the little heap without the wall. The last stone of the old chimney had been thrown into the mouth of the cavern and the whole covered over with earth. Dade and Bud and François finished smoothing down the fresh soil with their spades and then rested on the handles of their implements, admiring their completed work.

"I've ordered a new stone from Ste. Genevieve's," said François, "to make a suitable marking for the grave. The epitaph, exclusive of dates, will read:

" 'PAUL and HELEN
of BONNE TERRE,'
Friends of the Settlers
and Backwoodsmen!"

The three agreed that the end had come to all superstitious beliefs with reference to François's father. Henceforth his parents could rest

in peace, and for that much, if for nothing more, the son was thankful.

"Now, Uncle Si, since we've finished, let us turn to the squatting oak. You say my father asked you several times to commend it to me. Basil, in bidding me farewell, spoke of it. Let us examine it carefully and satisfy ourselves once for all whether or not it holds a secret. See, its boughs are calling us. Yes, I know I'm getting fanciful but father was such an extraordinary man!"

Without more words they gathered up spades, axes, and rakes, and walked abreast to the spot, fifty yards away, where the giant oak stood firmly planted on the hillside, a big knot near its base giving it the appearance of kneeling on one knee. Early frosts had mellowed the leaves and browned them pending their return to dust, and the sap was being slowly drained into the taproot and branching feet, that the bark might be left dry and tough to weather the winter blasts. Three feet in diameter, it could look with disdain upon the dwarf postoaks and blackjacks.

"Ah! Jean, I can remember when your mother laid you down on an old quilt, as a babe, to play an' coo under its spreadin' branches."

"Well, I can't go that far back, but I remember harnessing the big knot with straps of hickory

bark and calling it my horse. When I left home, at the age of fifteen, I turned and came near going back home as I saw it far above the other trees, waving me good-bye, or calling me—I could not decide which. It might have guessed the grief that awaited me on my return. Since then a few rings have been added to the grain of its body, but it matters not. Two centuries to come will not impair its vigor."

"What's it you inten' doin'?" asked Si.

"Search its rugged trunk and those strong limbs that stretch horizontally, like beams supporting a roof. If a secret has been entrusted to that venerable tree I feel that it it still safe—that the oak has been true to the trust confided to it, that its bark has not covered over any signs my father saw fit to imprint upon its body."

"Let's hope yer won't be disappointed, Jean."

The wind which was blowing quite strongly, scurried rudely through the thousands of twigs and showers of overripe acorns fell on the men who were admiring the monster tree.

"A fine old fellow!" remarked Bud. "There's not another like it in this neighborhood, nor in this country."

"Make a lot of fine boards or palin's. I'd jist

like to tackle it with my frow. Black oaks seldom gits so fine."

"As long as I live, Uncle Si, your frow will never cleave that trunk."

Of course, it was chance, but there was a merry rustle about the strong limbs that the wind could not move, and a half-thousand golden leaves circled around François before falling to the ground.

Dade exclaimed:

"The old tree's a-thankin' ye, François."

Around and around the stout trunk they walked, spying out every curious wrinkle in its coat. They dug up the soft mold about its feet and poked about with sharp sticks. Nothing came to light.

"There's nothing to be found," said Bud, sitting on the ground, his arms encircling his propped-up knees.

"Well, as we've discovered in the last few days, Father did extraordinary things. We should never have guessed the existence of the subterranean passage but for the old man. I'm not ready to give up. Make yourself comfortable, Uncle Si, I'm going to climb up there. I remember Father topping the tree. It was such a large tree that I wondered at his doing it—that is the second time. I mean to make a thorough search while I'm at it, from top to bottom and side to side."

François removed his boots and tried to scramble up the rough, gnarled surface. The task was somewhat difficult because the Captain's arms could reach but halfway around the trunk.

"Go on, Bud, give 'im a lif' " said Silas.

Bud did, and gave François a footing by means of a pole. Finally he succeeded in catching hold of the lowest limb, and pulling himself astride he gave a shout of triumph. It became an easy matter to mount to the main fork.

While resting a minute there came to his mind a vivid recollection of something he had seen his father do. He quickly ran his hands over the healed stubs of branches that had been chopped off, and he remembered that his father had sat just where he was, hacking away with an axe. He examined the new bark grown over the amputations—his eyes resting all the while upon a patch of the oak's mending which did not seem to be quite the natural covering for the socket of a lost member. A close scrutiny showed that there could not have been any amputation for the scar was exactly in the crotch of the main body. Taking his hawkbill knife, he picked into the thick rind.

"Stick an axe into the pole and hand it to me!" cried François.

" 'Scover anythin'?" asked Si.

"Not yet, but there's something here that looks strange, so I'm going to cut into it by way of inquiry."

Having received the axe he hacked away and in a short time the blade glanced off the edge of some metal.

"Ho there?" exclaimed Dade on whose ears the sound was not lost.

François did not answer at once, he was busy with his knife, trimming about the edge of an iron box whose exposed part measured four inches square. He spoke under strong emotion:

"I've found it—an iron box imbedded in the fork of the tree!"

Silas and Bud looked up rather incredulously.

"François, ye're jokin'."

"I'm not."

"How large is it?" asked Bud.

"About four inches each way. I've uncovered the lid, but I haven't been able to pry it open—it fits tightly over the box."

"An' ye're that calm 'bout it, François?" cried Dade wild with excitement. "Hurry an' break into it!"

"I can't. I'm going to take time and dig it out, though its a job. There's nothing to show how deep the box may be."

"Shucks! let me git up there an' I'll show you what to do. Jist dig the lid off, 'course you kin pry it off, what you care if you spoil the box, 'taint the box ye're after."

"I suppose I'll have to. If I'm careful I need not spoil the contents. There I'm starting."

"Two heads is better 'n one, if one is a sheep's head," remarked Dade.

A few seconds after while François silently worked away, the old man cried again:

"Seems to me ye're powerful calm 'bout your 'scovery. If 't was me findin' sumthin' up there, I'd be a-hip hawin' an' hurrahin' till I'd dropped off the tree—with the box and the lim'!"

François worked on industriously, intent on his task, trimming off the overlapping sapwood which had hidden the incision chiseled in the body of the oak by his father, until the lid was altogether exposed. This lid was of the ordinary type, the flanges fitting down on the outside of the box about one inch. He pried under the rim with the bit of the axe and it finally yielded to the persuasion. Repeated efforts brought it off with a fillip, and after whirring high above his head it fell rattling on some stones where Bud picked it up before it came to a standstill.

There was the proof.

A breathless suspense followed while the Captain delved into the box, bringing out packages of yellowed papers. He found that the box was about ten inches deep. After carefully removing every paper he found in the bottom a pocket knife and a gold watch which his father had worn when he, François, was a child and which he had missed seeing on his father long before he left home.

"Remarkable!" he cried.

"Don't waste time haranguin' up there, François, if yer thinks that's all come down. Jist drap the—whatever ye've found—yer haven't told us yet. We kin catch 'em."

François did as he was told and shambled down with the aid of the pole. Once on the ground he seized some papers and eagerly devoured their contents, passing them to Dade and Bud after examining them.

"Why, Captain, here are your deeds and patents to the land," said Bud. "Right now they are more precious to you than a bucketful of gold."

"What?" them papers tied up with that bit of calico string?" and Dade looked at them with awe.

"Yes, Uncle Si. You and Bud look through the bundle while I go through others."

Having given them something to do, so as to occupy them, François walked away from his

friends, just a few steps and seated himself on a stump. There were three separate lots of papers, and he undid the largest bunch. It consisted of two packages, one, an elaborate, formidable document, engrossed and signed under seals and legal requirements by—François could scarcely believe his eyes—Donald Douglas and his wife Theresa. There was no mistake, he was familiar with Donald Douglas's signature and in this case it was very plainly written. What could it mean? He wanted to read it through then and there but his eyes involuntarily turned to the other paper. It was in his father's handwriting and headed: "Important Facts for My Son." The opening sentence read: "My name is Paul Grennard!"

Dade and Bud were soon satisfied with the deeds, etc., and coming over to the Captain, stood about him, awaiting the complete story.

But François read and reread the manuscript without paying any attention to his lifelong friends. Next, he studied the document signed by the Douglases. When he had mastered the contents of both papers, he untied the third package. Scanning through its several sheets, he remarked:

"These are descriptions, drawings, etc., of the mines. This one here gives the details of the construction of the hearthstone door."

Taking up the deeds he carefully retied the papers and looked at the two men for a minute before speaking.

"Well," he exclaimed, brightening as if he contemplated a clear and sunny perspective on emerging from darkness and gloom.

"These papers will substantiate my claims to the land and free my name of the last shade of suspicion. With them I can look the world in the face and declare that I am a man about whose name clusters no mystery just because my father chose to appear extraordinary. My family history is here given, and not only is my father guiltless of any crime, but he is proven to be a man who has been the victim of his own exalted sense of honor and unbounded generosity."

"That sounds powerful fine, an' is mighty fine, I'm sure, Cap'n, but tell us 'bout it. Can't you trust us?"

François felt the gentle rebuke in the old man's voice and hastened to assure him that he and Bud held first places in his confidence. The novelty of the discovery had dazed him, and he meant to tell them everything.

"Jist think of it!" Silas interrupted as François proceeded to give him the gist of the story, "I always did say, old Paul could keep his own coun-

sel an' be that dum' 'bout it that he'd shame a dum' terrapin!"

François held up a manuscript: "This paper contains the details of my father's life. You may read at your leisure. There is also mention of my mother, but her history is very simple. She was the only child of a roving hunter and trapper whom my father met and married in Shannon County, about the time he first came to the Ozarks, before settling here. Not only was she an only child but she left no relatives whatever. Her mother died while quite young and her father shortly after my father took her, his daughter, away as a bride.

"But on the other hand my father's life is full of interest. And Dade — his name was — Paul Grennard!"

"Yer don't say so?" Silas tugged fiercely at his beard, while his clean-shaven upper lip twitched with excitement. His eyes narrowed to mere slits.

"And, does that mean, Cap'n that you've got to change yer name now?" Silas now looked puzzled.

François went on:

"Paul Grennard, my father, according to this paper written by himself, was born in Paris. The Grennard family ranked as one of the wealthiest and most powerful in the reign of the Great Em-

peror. Unfortunately my father, then a lad of seventeen, was one of several who, joined in a political prank which afterwards developed into a plot of considerable proportions, and thereby endangered my grandfather's credit with Napoleon. The irate Emperor went so far as to hint that he would confiscate the Grennard estates. This so frightened the family that my father was appealed to and persuaded to exile himself from France, promising solemnly never to return to his native land or even communicate with his parents.

"With five thousand francs his father had given him, the young man came to St. Louis, and, by chance, met Donald Douglas's father who employed him in a rich firm owned and controlled by him, the firm of D. Douglas & Co., the elder Douglas whom we know being then a lad two years or so younger than my father. These two became fast friends.

"By the end of five years, Paul Grennard had learned the English language and worked himself into a post of responsibility in the firm, a post next in importance to that held by Donald Douglas.

"The young men loved the same girl, Theresa Murton, who is now Mrs. Douglas. Her marriage was the first cause in changing my father's whole

after life, turning him into a secretive, noncommittal, strange man.

"Generously, however, he had stepped aside and let Donald marry Theresa, and he might have found peace in sacrifice, when shortly after his wedding, Donald Douglas confessed to Father that he had embezzled a large sum of the firm's money. Should his father, the elder Douglas, ever hear of it as he must some day, he would treat his son as a common criminal. In order to spare Theresa disgrace, Paul Grennard, because of his love for the young wife of his friend, assumed the husband's guilt. He persuaded and permitted young Douglas to manipulate the records that the responsibility of the crime be shifted on to him. When all was ready, and a certain agreement entered into between the young couple and my father, in the dead of the night, Father came away to the Ozarks, leaving behind him on one hand, peace and security; on the other, rage and accusations of which he was the innocent target. Hence it was to conceal his identity that he appropriated his mother's family name.

"This instrument," continued François as he held up another paper, "is an agreement prepared by a lawyer and signed by Donald Douglas, Theresa Douglas, and Paul Grennard, in which the

couple agree to transfer to my father or his heirs, two-thirds of all they might inherit or ever become possessed of, whenever the said Paul Grennard, or his heirs, shall demand it, provided it be after the death of D. Douglas of the firm of D. Douglas & Co. The consideration named is the rendering of a certain service by Paul Grennard to Donald Douglas.

"On the back of the paper the service is fully explained, just what I've already said: the assumption of the guilt of Donald Douglas. The paper specifically provides that Paul Grennard does not obligate himself to repay said shortage or any part thereof.

"It is an unusual document, and probably would carry only a moral obligation to execute its provisions."

"But it is Mr. Douglas's indisputable acknowledgment of the crime—his crime," said Bud gravely.

"Yes, there is something in that. I could always hold it over him in case—"

"That's it!" cried Dade. "It's a powerful club to force 'im to deed back yer lan' to yer!"

"And it looks as if he'll oblige me to use it against him. But that's all I'm going to do with

it—use it to force him to the restoration of my rights."

"When will you act?"

"There's no time like the present, Bud, and I propose to work fast—while the Syndicate is near at hand."

"That's got the right ring, Cap'n. Me an' Bud 'll let on same as if we didn't know nuthin'. You can paddle your canoe better with jist yourself in it. Do like Paul, keep your own counsel, now you've unburdened to yer frien's, it oughter be easy 'nough, but shucks!—yer know what from tuther," and Dade took out his "terbacky" plug and cut off a chew.

Bud and François gathered up the implements, and, the "treasure" safe in the Captain's hands, the three men walked back towards the village.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

INTERVENTION.

Now that Virginia's mind was at rest about Henry Ryan, her thoughts were more than ever occupied with François. The pending lawsuit gave her concern despite her encouraging assurances as to the chances in his favor. It seemed to her that François had received most unfair treatment at the hands of the Douglases. She firmly believed the deed obtained through fraud. According to her reasoning this was borne out by Theresa's pleading with Dan and her subsequent comments, before the reconciliation. Undoubtedly there was something irregular in the transaction, or how could such a thing have occurred to Theresa, even granting that the old lady was peculiar? Her wailings still rang in Virginia's ears. Why couldn't she and Flora testify at the trial that they witnessed the interview between mother and son in which Mrs. Douglas pleaded with Dan, while they and François were sitting in the playhouse in the forest?

It might just prove that Theresa *thought* there was something wrong in the transaction since recent events showed that her scruples had vanished. If she were as clever as her husband and her son she could invent a plausible story.

Virginia had never until then permitted herself to interfere with her neighbors' exercise of freedom, nor was she one given to officiousness. But in this case her interest in Captain François's lawsuit, though she assured herself it was confined to a sincere desire to see him obtain justice, caused her to want to help him as far as it lay in her power. This was not because she doubted his ability to fight for himself, but because she knew there is often error in the decisions of courts. That was what she feared. If a private settlement could be accomplished, she argued with herself, it would be far more satisfactory than a decision of the court. In losing the lawsuit, François would lose all. That should be prevented at any cost.

In pondering over ways and means for correcting any weak point in the case, an idea occurred to Virginia. She acknowledged to herself that it was most certainly one the Captain would not use, but being a woman, she reasoned as such, and did not see any objection to it. She took into consideration that Theresa and Dan's wife—if they

could be made to believe that fraud had been resorted to in order to wrest François's property from him, they might prevail upon Donald Douglas to restore the land. Women, she argued, as a rule are more scrupulous than men, they have a keener sense of justice and—honesty. If she could appeal to their fairness, a long step in the direction of compromise would have been taken. Again, if she failed, she would not complicate matters, for the men would not pay much attention to women's meddling. It was very trying to know what to do. But something must be done, and at once. Although she tried to dismiss the thought for a while she went about with the feeling that she would do something in spite of herself.

Until then Virginia had had nothing in common with the two women. In both cases a sense of delicacy restrained her from making advances to them, besides, she had never felt particularly drawn to Theresa although she pitied her. Katie's youthful face appealed to her much more. Theresa had always stood out in Virginia's mind as someone apart from the two Douglases—and herself. An uncomfortable feeling that she could not explain had kept her from discussing her with Dan. She had tried once, after the meeting in the woods with no good resulting therefrom. Since

the breaking off of her engagement with Dan, she had nothing to say to him and therefore held no intercourse with the younger Mrs. Douglas. Just as she hit upon a course of action it flashed upon her that it would be absurd or even foolish for her to expect these women to plead with their husbands to give up the Captain's property. In the first place they would not believe her and would ask by what right she appealed to them.

Nevertheless the girl's good sense recommended a compromise and how could it be reached? She owned that interference might be regarded as highly impudent in her and might subject her, in case of failure, to the ridicule of the Douglases, both of the men and the women, to say nothing of incurring the Captain's displeasure. The latter possibility caused her to wish to refrain.

While the Captain was busy collecting his new weapons from the tree, Virginia, who knew nothing of his discoveries—she had not spoken to him since the day before at the burial, and then, exchanged only a few remarks like many others present—was hurrying through a short-cut across the common when whom should she meet coming in the opposite direction, but Theresa and Katie.

"Why, Virginia!" exclaimed the elder lady affably, "it's been, so to speak, an age since I saw

you. You quite neglect me. Why don't you come to see me sometimes? There should not be anything between us."

"And there is not, that I know," said Virginia taking Theresa's hand.

"I'm glad to hear you say it. Virgie, this is Dan's wife. I do not believe you two have ever met before. I have told her much of you, Virginia."

The two young women expressed themselves pleased to get acquainted, and Virginia made up her mind then and there that Katie had a lovable disposition.

Theresa rattled on:

"How well you look, Virgie. What are you doing this fall?—fancy work, knitting, or reading? I've been telling Katie that if you didn't come we soon must call on you."

Virginia was at a loss for something to say. But that did not trouble Mrs. Douglas senior. She continued:

"Why don't you come along with us now and see our new house just across the common? You were heading that way. Come, you won't refuse an old friend. It's early yet. We'll have a chat about old times—when I was a boarder at the

Birsches. You needn't mind Katie, she knows all about me."

The younger woman did not have a chance to put in a word. Virginia answered falteringly:

"I, too, have been wanting to see you, for some time. If you insist, I'll accompany you." Then an inner force impelled her to add: "I'd like to talk over an important matter with you."

Theresa glanced at the girl quickly, trying to divine what the important matter could be—she never associated it for an instant with Captain François's affairs. However, the "important matter" judging from Virginia's agitation must be out of the ordinary. Theresa's cunning put her on guard.

"Very well," she added not less cordially but with a vague note of suspicion, "Katie and I shall be delighted."

In the short walk required to bring them to the pretty residence of the Douglases, Katie got ahead with Virginia and managed to say enough to win Virginia's sympathy and confidence. Without regretting the step, now she had the opportunity at hand, the Captain's friend and champion, felt a little trepidation at launching her subject. She postponed the opening attack, waiting that something might lead up to what was on her mind.

Meanwhile, she chatted gaily without apparent effort, and Theresa, watching her, was completely thrown off guard.

Once within the house, several minutes were consumed by Katie who showed Virginia some embroidery and other work she had busied herself with during the fall. There was something so innocently sweet about Dan's wife that Katie was attracted by a natural fascination. A rapid flow of congenial women's talk enlivened the visit and gradually broke the crust for Virginia to say what she felt she must when the moment seemed opportune.

"You were saying," began Theresa, "that you want to tell us something. Now that the pretty things are out of the way, we are ready to listen. Is it something about the new church? I think you are interested in Father Duncan's getting the necessary funds, are you not?"

"Yes, I am, but that is not the point. I have indeed something of importance to talk over with you. I've been intending to come—for some time, really."

She stopped short. Again she doubted whether it would be wise to speak in the presence of Katie. Perhaps it would be sufficient to mention the matter to Theresa.

Donald's wife, not comprehending what was going on in Virginia's mind, but seeing her look at Dan's wife, put an end to any plea of evasion by saying:

"You must consider my daughter as one of us, for we do everything together. Whatever you have to tell can be just as safely entrusted to her as to me."

By this time Theresa realized that Virginia must be bound on a serious mission of some kind judging from her looks, and as if breathed in from the air, a subdued, attentive aspect settled upon all three at the same time.

Virginia hesitated so long that her listeners became restless under the strain of suspense. Finally she ventured upon the subject in measured, broken phrases.

"It may be that you—will misunderstand me, that is my daring to mix up with your affairs. It is probable you will think it presumption on my part to broach such a proposal to you, but if I can only make you see my motive is not a selfish one, that I'm considering you in this matter as well as Captain François, I'm sure you will pardon me.

"You see I do not censure you in the least. It

is only a question of fairness, only before I say more I should—"

She hesitated again, seemed to be waiting for encouragement to continue. Although Theresa's heart was fluttering she managed to say:

"Please tell us, I have known you these many years and am sure you would never say anything, much less do anything I would censure. Whatever it is you have to say we are ready to listen to you with free minds."

Did the old lady really mean it, or was it curiosity that was urging her? Her words sounded all right but her tone suggested defiance. Virginia threw caution to the winds and proceeded fearlessly:

"Mrs. Douglas, I want to speak to you of the pending lawsuit. Only before I do I wish to assure you that I'm doing so on my own responsibility."

"You're making that quite plain. May I ask you what lawsuit you have in mind?"

Virginia replied impatiently, almost angrily; the old spirit of the backwoods urging her:

"There is only one lawsuit at present that is of any interest to the people in Bonne Terre: Captain François's lawsuit."

Katie made a motion to rise, Theresa held her back.

"Well?" she asked.

"Mrs. Douglas, we old residents of Bonne Terre have always known that the mining lands, the subject of the suit, belonged to Jean François. Now it turns out that Mr. Douglas holds a warranty deed to that land when the Captain and others are certain that the land was simply leased for twenty-five years. The consideration for the lease was one thousand dollars and a certain royalty. For years that royalty was paid. I've seen the vouchers."

"Well?" This was said very calmly.

Virginia turned her eyes full on the questioner.

"It is no use getting so excited," said Theresa, "If you will allow me to explain—"

"Mrs. Douglas, your husband has filed a warranty deed in Farmington instead of the lease. How was that done?"

"Virginia, as I've said, if you'd allow me to explain I can do so to your satisfaction if not to Captain François's.

"I thought like you, I did not know Donald had purchased the land—until I went to New York. I understood until then,—but you see I had never discussed it with my husband,—that it

was a lease. I suppose I got my information from the Birsches, Flora Birsch, who like you is a staunch friend of Captain François's. You are misled just as I was. Do you know that I went to New York principally for that reason—to satisfy myself about the lease? I am frank, I went there for the purpose of circumventing my husband and my son. You may have heard what happened. After my reconciliation—I'd been working on mere supposition—I mentioned the matter to Mr. Douglas and Dan and they showed me the deed. What other proof could I require? Captain François's signature was affixed to it."

Virginia felt the hopelessness of the situation. She could hear the Court rendering its decision. She felt she must make another attempt and strove to be calm.

"But Mrs. Douglas, did they tell you under what circumstances the deed was obtained?"

"No. What difference could that make?"

"Do you think one thousand dollars an adequate sum in payment for six hundred acres of mineralized land—known to be such at the time?"

"It was a small sum, but that was several years ago."

Virginia could scarcely refrain from reminding Mrs. Douglas of a certain meeting in the woods

and her appeal for the very man she now seemed so indifferent about, but one look at Katie deterred her. She would try again.

"Mrs. Douglas, I know the history of the signing of that deed. You and your daughter-in-law can take it as the exact truth. It will probably be related in court and it is to avoid that, I came to you, that is, I was thinking of coming—"

Katie looked frightened, Theresa placed a reassuring hand on her shoulder and turned to Virginia with a look of dignity which made the latter wonder.

"We shall both listen to you, but I warn you that if you are mistaken, as I know you are, you shall listen to me."

Virginia proceeded:

"Just before the execution of the deed in dispute, a mining lease had been discussed, and, according to Captain François's account, on arriving at an agreement, he received a note from Mr. Douglas and Dan requesting him to meet them at Dade's Inn on a certain night to sign the contract. The note is still in his possession, I've seen it. Well, on arriving at the Inn, plenty of whiskey was served and all, except Dan, became intoxicated."

"Who was to blame for that? If the Captain

had no better sense, I'm sure it's no fault of my husband's. My son, at least, remembered he was a gentleman."

That piqued Virginia more than any previous comment. For the while she forgot Katie's presence.

"Mrs. Douglas, your son chose to remain sober because he was managing the proceedings, seeing that when the proper stage of inebriety had been reached the papers to be signed should be so mixed, that the Captain signed a deed instead of the lease which was read out aloud and to which he was sworn. You'll say why didn't the Captain examine the papers. That's where he made his mistake, he never suspected he had to deal with—"

"Virginia!" almost shrieked Theresa. She had risen and her face, already pale, was like marble. She pressed a hand across her bosom.

The girl did not finish. Katie sprang up and began to cry.

"I'm sorry, so sorry, poor dear!" said Virginia contritely, "you two can't help it, but it's the truth!"

Mrs. Douglas looked appealingly at her visitor. In the last minute she seemed to have aged ten years. Her former dignity mingled with sprightliness had left her.

"Yes, Mrs. Douglas, it is the truth. Now the reason I'm speaking thus to you and Dan's wife, is because I think you can help. I'm pleading with you two ladies, to use your influence to induce Mr. Douglas to restore to Captain François his land and thereby end the suit."

Katie looked up.

"Mamma Theresa," she cried, "I think she is right. There is something I'd like to tell you, something I should have told you long ago, but Dan forbade me: I owe my happiness to Captain François!"

Then she rocked to and fro:

"But, oh! how can I side against my husband! Do not ask me any questions for I must not answer them!"

Astonishment kept Virginia and Theresa silent.

"Still, Captain François must get justice—if it is as you say it is."

"Hush, Katie!" It was Theresa who spoke.

At that moment the opening of the front gate had attracted her attention. Through the small door they saw Donald Douglas enter, and also saw Captain François coming through the common, about thirty yards behind the old man, but evidently unobserved by him.

"Oh! he's coming here!" cried Virginia, "he must not see me!"

"Quick, then, in here!" directed Theresa.

All three scampered into an adjoining room, darkened by closed blinds, but before they had time to shut the door between it and the reception room, Mr. Douglas entered.

He had not more than removed his hat and taken a few steps forward, when Captain François knocked sharply at the door facing the room to which the ladies had escaped.

"Hello, there!" cried Mr. Douglas, taken by surprise.

"Yes, Mr. Douglas, it is I. Will you allow me a few minutes interview?"

"Why not? I have never refused to speak with you."

"I know it, and having something very important to say, something I think it best for you to hear alone, I have come to talk with you—as a gentleman."

Virginia made a movement to leave the room, but Theresa checked her. The next minute it was too late.

Douglas had hesitated a moment, and Virginia could see he was confused. In his surprise he held the door ajar, keeping his hand on the door-knob.

His words had been more inviting than his actions.

"Come in," he finally said motioning his caller inside.

"Shall we be quite alone?"

"Yes; my wife and daughter went beyond the valley. They won't be back for an hour or more."

Theresa, Katie and Virginia were huddled together in the farthest corner of the darkened room, but they could see the two men plainly through a lace portiére in the reception room, the men being in the light. In fact, when François took a seat opposite Mr. Douglas's the women could see plainly both parties and hear every word that was said.

Virginia was hot and cold by turns. She did not want to listen but then neither did she want François and Mr. Douglas to see her leave. As for Theresa she could not make her out, the old lady had regained for the time being her complete self-control and was the least disturbed of the three.

"We must know what is going on, that we might help," she whispered to Virginia when the latter spoke in her ear asking if there was any way of escaping unobserved.

The men lost no time. François began:

"Mr. Douglas, I've come to you to give you an opportunity of proposing a settlement."

"That sounds good. I'm glad you've come to your senses. You see, my dear Captain, your memory—"

"I think you mistake the manner of man I am. When you have read these papers, I believe you will view everything in a different light."

"I do not wish to be discourteous, Captain, but you have no papers in which I could possibly be interested. The only paper of importance in the suit is on record or file at Farmington. I have a copy in the hands of my lawyer in New York."

"I have papers," the Captain spoke in measured tones, "which concern both you and me. Only an hour ago, I recovered them from an iron box concealed in an oak tree."

"What are you talking about? I'm a busy man, Captain, and have no time for such—such—"

François paid no attention but kept on:

"You cannot have escaped hearing that my father was a most extraordinary man, not to say eccentric."

"Yes, I've heard he was most peculiar. There were even rumors about him that were not exactly of a nature to—"

. . . . . .

"Beware, Mr. Douglas, how you speak of my father!"

Theresa turned deathly pale and clutched Virginia's arm.

"Before you express yourself about his eccentricity I should like to ask you if you remember one Paul Grennard?"

"What if I do?" almost shouted Donald Douglas as he arose from his seat in great agitation.

"Be seated, Mr. Douglas. Well, what I would say is that Paul Grennard and Paul François are the same. The first night of your arrival in Bonne Terre, you told me I reminded you of—Paul Grennard. Have you forgotten that?"

Douglas stared at François like a man who has become suddenly paralyzed.

"You think these papers will interest you, do you not?"

Theresa had known all the time who Jean really was, and before her reconciliation to her husband she thought he must know also. But the fact that Jean was ignorant of it—she had soon discovered that—had lulled her into a feeling of security. Now, she was about to sink on the floor, but Virginia supported her, so she stood rigid against the young woman, eager not to lose a word.

"You have not answered me, Mr. Douglas."

"Yes! yes!" shouted the old man attempting to rise, but he fell back in his seat gazing straight before him.

"This paper," continued François, in the same even tone he had started with, "you will recognize as having been signed by you and Theresa, your wife. It constitutes a general, sweeping covenant respecting the transfer of your property in consideration of—"

"Let me see that paper!" said Douglas, trying to regain mastery of the situation. His shrewdness was urging him to control himself.

"No, sir, that paper does not go out of my possession until I have attended to some matters of importance.

"In consideration of—"

"Hush! hush!" cried Douglas hoarsely. "It is unnecessary for you to state it. I know. The consideration was—"

"Mr. Douglas, do you realize that the consideration my father paid for was done in units more valuable than diamonds?"

"I—I suppose so."

"You suppose so?"

"I mean I acknowledge it."

"This paper will prove it to you if you never realized it before. Read this."

Donald Douglas took the paper thrust into his hands. He would have refused to read it if the Captain's determination had not forced him to peruse it, trembling all the while like a condemned man. Indeed, he was convicted under his own signature,—the same weapon he had thought to force François to acknowledge the deed—and the irate son of the man he had wronged probably meant to pronounce and execute the sentence against him.

"It is all true—yes, the part that refers to my past."

Then having confessed, he tried to palliate his guilt.

"It is all true, but that was more than thirty years ago. Since that day I've lived as an upright man and sought to be fair to all."

"Ah! Mr. Douglas, you forget your latest offence. Because I'm not able to deny my signature you mean to enforce the deed. You and your son took advantage of me, under the influence of drink, a result of your planning, to make me sign a document that no man in his sense would have put his name to. And yet, my father bore the consequences of your crime!"

Douglas fidgeted in his chair.

"It was Dan. I did not know you to be Grennard's son."

"I have my doubts about that. However that is not the point. You acknowledge your guilt?"

"Yes," came from the old man as his head sank lower and lower in shame.

"Mr. Douglas, your age protects you. Where is your son?"

"In St. Louis. What do you want with him? He has nothing to do with my past." He spoke with difficulty.

"We shall not require him. In fact, I'm glad for his sake and yours, and his mother's and wife's as well, that he is away. The wrong was committed in your name. I hope you are prepared to sign papers."

"No; that is, not in my son's name."

"Mr. Douglas, you will gain nothing by trying to dilly-dally in this matter. You will only wear out my patience."

"Please, Captain, if I do, will you remain silent about this—unfortunate affair?"

"I make no promises, although I feel sorry for young Mrs. Douglas. She, at least, does not merit this disgrace."

Captain François arose and paced the room for

a few minutes. The old man's eyes were fastened on his every movement.

The Captain stopped short in front of him:

"At two o'clock, Mr. Douglas, I shall return with certain papers, will you and Mrs. Douglas be present to sign?"

"Yes," came hoarsely from the old man's lips.

The Captain left the house.

Five minutes later, Virginia tore herself away from the two weeping women whose sobs had finally attracted Donald Douglas's attention. He was too crushed to ask questions, but with red spots on his cheeks he watched Miss Bardsdell pass through the reception room and let herself out the front door.

CHAPTER XL.

THE TURNING IN THE LANE.

PROMPTLY at two o'clock, Captain Jean Grennard and Samuel Johnson, the local justice of the peace, entered the Douglas home. A deathlike silence prevailed over the place. A gray-haired man and his mate sat at a little table in the attitude of expecting callers. The door having been left open, there was no occasion for them to advance and ask the men to enter; however, they arose, pale and humble, showing that the heavy blow of delayed justice had crushed them.

Not a word was spoken. Donald Douglas motioned the men to seats. They, with hats removed, bowed and drew near the table, but remained standing,—their manner indicating that business was uppermost with them.

Johnson drew a paper from his coat pocket.

"Be seated, Mr. and Mrs. Douglas, and I shall read this to you. It is a warranty deed from you to Jean Grennard, conveying to him certain lands described."

He read the deed in a rapid monotone. Spreading it out on the table, he dipped the quill pen in the bottle of ink and handed it to Donald Douglas:

"Sign here. Mrs. Douglas will sign under your name."

With a trembling hand Donald signed and passed the pen to his wife who quietly affixed her full name to the paper. The Justice took their acknowledgement with due solemnity, and the Captain tendered the "one dollar" consideration in conformity with the law. The silver coin lay on the table, untouched.

Jean Grennard received from the Justice's hands the instrument of transfer. Then, he turned to Donald Douglas and bowed in acknowledgement.

"Now, this," said François, drawing another paper from an inner pocket and addressing the couple for the first time, "is a release from me to both of you from the provisions of the agreement you executed many years ago to my father, Paul Grennard. I want only my property. I deliver this instrument to you in the presence of Mr. Johnson."

Douglas took the paper mechanically, and waited to do whatever else might be required of him.

"Mr. Douglas," Jean held a third paper in his

hand, "I believe Dan has transferred to you his rights in the Syndicate."

"He has."

"Then you and Mrs. Douglas will please sign a transfer to me. Here it is ready, I shall ask Mr. Johnson to make you acquainted with the import of its contents."

The document was read in the same perfunctory manner as the first, husband and wife signing it without demurring.

"Thank you. You are only doing your duty and I am doing mine, but you shall not find me ungrateful. Mr. Douglas, you and your son have done much in promoting the mines and consummating an agreement with the Syndicate. In consideration thereof, I shall protect you both for a one quarter interest which you may divide between yourselves as you may desire."

"We want nothing," answered Douglas in a faltering voice.

"Nevertheless, you shall have it. I mean to be fair to you. I shall not carry your punishment so far as to deprive you of what I believe to be your due. At the proper time I shall sign a document to that effect. For the present, I must be free to treat with the men who have invested thousands of dollars in my property."

"Mrs. Douglas and I thank you."

"To-morrow these documents will be recorded, and my lawyer will file a motion dismissing the suit which is now pending against you."

Captain Grennard and Mr. Johnson took their leave in a strictly formal manner. In closing the gate there was some trouble with the lock and Jean, in trying to discover the trouble, accidently glanced in the direction of the house: the front door had been left open and he could see Douglas and his wife still sitting at the table, with heads bowed, and Katie standing back of them—a sorrowful spectator.

From the Douglas home the Captain hastened to the Inn to keep an appointment with the Syndicate. Not a second had he lost—before going to the Douglases he had called the members together. Upon arriving at the Inn, he found Henry Ryan, Sam Bolivar, the older men from New York, and Adolf Birsch waiting for him in Dade's relic room, the same in which the Captain, some ten years before, had signed away his property for the paltry sum of one thousand dollars—under false representation. In the meantime his experiences had been varied, and the present Jean Grennard had learned much at the crack of the lash of adversity; as he now confronted the Syndi-

cate which represented one of the wealthiest groups in New York, he was a man thoroughly capable, masterful, able to cope with the complications of the situation as it stood. While these men did not deem him their superior, they admitted he could control local following for or against them, and Birsch had assured them he could manage an army of rough miners, getting more work out of them than any other man in the company's employ. That he knew practical mining they had also learned from Garland, their engineer.

But that he also had the brains and education to direct the business of a large and successful concern they had as yet no idea of. The most they dared hope from his summons was the perspective of a compromise with the Douglases. Donald Douglas's absence from the meeting puzzled and nettled the pessimists who still held that they would lose out on the investment.

On the other hand those who looked on the bright side of the enterprise preferred to deal directly and exclusively with François. Several had spoken with him, meeting him as they did at the Inn, and they agreed that while he was rather modest, he was upholding his rights with a determination that commanded their respect. They

wanted his lands and proposed to get François's co-operation.

The absolute confidence with which he addressed the meeting held the attention of both sides.

"Gentlemen, I have called you together to inform you that you may proceed with the development of the mines. It must have been very trying and discouraging to postpone the work for several weeks as you have done, pending a disagreeable lawsuit. Your agreement with the old company known as the "La Grave" Company, expires in a month's time. It is important that you prove or disprove the theory that lead ore exists in a disseminated stratum within your allotted period of time."

Jean Grennard, but to the members Jean François, addressed them as if expecting compliance with his proposals. Several of the older men readjusted their glasses and surveyed the Captain. Ryan nudged Bolivar and whispered: "He's the man we want."

"You would have us understand, do you not, that all complications over titles are settled?" inquired a banker at the right of Henry Ryan who had heard the latter's remark. He asked the question which he knew was on the mind of his associates. His tone and manner indicated that he

hoped the answer favorable and that François was the owner.

"I am the owner and Master of Bonne Terre."

"The particulars," demanded the same banker, with the same keenly interested look of one who tests the fineness of a gold coin before accepting it in payment.

"Here is a warranty deed from Donald Douglas and his wife, Theresa Douglas, to Jean Grennard, the legal name of one Jean François. This paper is a transfer to me, from the same parties, and it vests me with all their rights in the Syndicate. I appear to you now as absolute, indefeasible owner of the land, comprising six hundred acres claimed by Mr. Douglas, and I address you, as a member of your Syndicate, to execute existing agreements."

"Ah! that is most gratifying!" exclaimed the solid, implacable Birsch.

"It is indeed a pity that we did not have you to deal with all along," said Henry Ryan. "What are your plans?"

The Captain, after acknowledging the compliment, held to the business part of the meeting.

"That is for you to suggest," he replied modestly.

"Well, not only has the lawsuit stopped us, and

labor become demoralized, but there actually exists some doubt as to our success after we sink the shaft to the hundred fifty foot level. What is your opinion?"

"Let us review the situation, Gentlemen. I understand that you have invested heavily in both the projects, represented by the two old companies: La Grave and Des Loges. It is right that you should have the chance of gathering in the harvest. But the time is short. Before the end of this year, 1869, you will have won or forfeited the mine. My suggestion is to resume the development work to-morrow. However, if you hesitate or wish to retire, I undertake to bind myself this afternoon to return your money with ten per cent. interest within a fortnight. What will you do?"

The question was put with force and it fell on the assembly like a thunder clap.

Ryan was on his feet at once.

"I move we accept the gentleman's offer!"

"Nonsense! nonsense!" shouted Charles B. Parsons springing up in time to press Ryan back into his seat, "Everyone of you know I have almost perfected the organization of a company to take over the Syndicate's contract."

He turned to Jean Grennard:

"We shall carry out the agreement, Captain, and I may enlighten you by advising you of the fact that last week there was landed at Ste. Genevieve's the first diamond drill ever intended for prospecting in this country. We thought of testing its usefulness on this property."

Parsons seconded by Ryan, who made a quick shift in positions, settled the question.

A temporary memorandum was drawn up in confirmation of the old agreement, also extending the option until Jan. 1st, 1870, to allow for loss of time on account of the dispute over titles and enable the work to be completed.

On the same day, Bud Dade, mounted on his father's old black mare, rode about the settlement and notified the men to report for work and back pay, at seven o'clock the next morning. Five double teams of mules, with wagons and men, were dispatched at once to Ste. Genevieve's to bring in the new diamond drill and equipment.

In a few days the drill was set up near the shaft, and its upright, portable engine chugged away from that time on, spinning the round tube, with its bits of black diamonds on the bottom cutting a circular core about an inch in diameter. Now and then the pipe was hauled up and the rock core taken out and examined.

The use of this novel drill aroused the curiosity of the people for miles; many came from the countryside and Potosi, Pilot Knob, Ste. Genevieve, De Soto, and St. Louis, even from Chicago and New York—to see the steam-moved augur bore into the solid rock bed of the earth. Bud Dade who had charge of the engine and drill, while Parsons and François directed the sinking of the shaft, had great difficulty in keeping the crowds back from the engine. He was handicapped in his work answering time and again different ones who wanted to know why a stream of water kept pouring down the drill tube, or pipe, and many other things suggested by the strange machine. Finally, he roped off the engine and called for a patrol.

Bonne Terre was overrun with strangers. Dade's Inn accommodated many and the villagers made money by taking in boarders at double rates. Last, but not least, among the institutions that prospered during the feverish excitement was Silas's General Store.

"Whoopee!" he would shout at the sight of the Captain, "Yer haint the only one 'struck it rich!' Let 'er go, Gallagher! By Jinks we've got the bull by the tail an' at a down-hill fling!"

Bud reported to a meeting of the Syndicate, presided over, as usual since the reorganization of

the forces, by Captain Jean Grennard. He declared that the core taken from the drill at one hundred ten foot level showed flecks of lead mixed with the rock.

"What's your opinion?" asked Parsons and Ryan with one voice.

"That the bed of ore at that point will be reached somewhere between one hundred twenty-five to one hundred fifty foot depth. Up where you talked of putting the machine, it would have been two hundred fifty feet . That's why the Captain and I insisted on the lower area. We know."

"You speak with the accustomed certainty of an experienced prospector," said Ryan.

"One can afford to be positive when he knows."

The Captain drummed on the table. He wished to remind Bud of discretion.

"The Captain doesn't seem to see any joke in it," put in Bolivar.

A gleam shot through the Captain's eyes and it arrested Wyman Jones's attention.

"You look, Captain, as if you and Mr. Dade are acquainted with the secrets of the earth. Have you been crawling about its beds of ore?" He spoke at random, and did not expect any other but perhaps a laughing reply or jest from Bolivar who was ever ready to make fun. But the Captain's

features retained their calm, sphinxlike expression.

"You are stating a fact as far as this particular bed of ore is concerned, Mr. Wyman, and we are prepared to certify to our explorations."

"In that case," suggested Parsons, "we needn't wait but may proceed at once with our organization. Things are so certain."

"You may, in all security," said the Captain with the same imperturable calmness. "Select the name."

"I've done that. The name of the corporation formed is 'The St. Joseph Lead Company!' "

"Good! and let us hope that the organization will add to the mines already known to the world, one of the largest and richest."

Although in those days the Master of Bonne Terre was seen most of the time with Messrs. Ryan, Parsons, Jones, Bolivar, Birsch, and other members of the Syndicate—more frequently with the three first named—he found quiet hours, ever and anon, to devote to the one woman who had ever fully entered his life.

The lane Jean Grennard had traveled since his fifteenth birthday had been a long one, but as certainly as every rivulet finds its way to the sea, every road, whether dark or bright, rough or

smooth, either comes to an end or has a turning. For many years now, his love for a woman had lighted the way, and though he had never spoken, her friendship and devotion had helped him onward, while his undimmed faith in God kept hope alive. From his point of vantage in the old oak tree, Jean was not long in descrying the turning point in his life. There, a new panorama spread before his wondering gaze, and he hastened towards the goal about which the new scenes unfolded. He need no longer fear to take unto himself the gentle companion of his dreams.

Occasionally, Bud and he walked to the street corner where they separated to visit different houses. Jean, at times, complained to his lifelong friend that he was being neglected by him, but Bud gave some excuse or other, not wishing the Captain to misconstrue his true motive which was that the prominent place his friend filled in the great Syndicate isolated and distinguished him to the point where Bud and even Dade hesitated to show him any familiarity before strangers. Although Jean would indeed have been wounded by the suggestion, his good common sense soon made him see the justice of it. He felt sorry for his old backwoods friend and his son and determined that Bud would yet earn distinction and fill a high po-

sition in the company. For the present he decided to show them his accustomed cordial manner and ignore the restraint they plainly showed in his presence. A gem whether set in wood, iron, or gold has the same intrinsic value that can not be changed—the setting may.

Virginia was proud of her lover, for such she felt François to be, although he had not yet spoken on the subject so near their lips that it radiated in every glance they exchanged. She was too human not to rejoice at what the future held so certainly in store for her, too human not to feel deliciously thrilled when she saw the broad, heavily-knit frame of the tall handsome man who was the whole world to her, stop at her gate and lift the latch, his clean-shaven face aglow with eager happiness. If, by chance, she saw a pair of feminine eyes gaze after him with interest, or again watch him from behind half-parted curtains, a rich color would mount her cheeks and her heart swelled with pardonable pride. As a sensible, warm-blooded woman she was entitled to expect everybody to look twice at the Captain,—and the town was now full of many who were willing to do it. She was also excusable for admitting to herself that she was to be envied.

Still, while she had a perfect right to feel as she

did, since Jean had not openly spoken of his love by what process of reasoning did Virginia feel justified in giving free rein to her feelings? Could she not have been mistaken and taken too optimistic a view of his renewed attentions? There were times when he was just as eager to be in her company, when evening after evening found him at her home. Ah! a woman's intuition is never at fault in such cases! It told her that at any minute she could expect to be told in warm, unmistakable language of the love of years. Did she ever need to be told when spring was at hand? There were pleasant springlike days in winter but was there not a subtle distinction between the two? Had she opened her window, blindfolded, though the temperature were the same, could she not have told when the grass must be soft underfoot, when the flowers fragranced the air, and that the rustle she heard among the boughs of the trees was caused, not by the wind, but by the nesting birds, though for some reason or other they were silent at the time? She knew.

At last one Saturday morning, the diamond augur bored straight into the body of lead ore. The news spread like wild-fire and caused great excitement. The great mine was found! In fact, the same which the Indians, long since dispersed,

had known of for ages, and which one of the tribes, the Chickasaws, had guarded against the White Man, going so far as to destroy the settlement at mine La Motte to prevent its discovery!

The local brass band, something quite recent, marched through the streets that same afternoon, playing lustily and electrifying the villagers; and an open carriage, another innovation in the line of conveyances, containing Grennard, Parsons, Jones, and Ryan drove along near the head of a procession, extemporary streamers fluttering from the horses sides. On the streamers were painted:

"Success to the St. Joseph Lead Company!"

That was the Company's first appearance in public. A half holiday was declared, and the village on the three hills was gay with rejoicing.

Near the setting of the sun when throats were sore from shouting, and the capitalists gathered at the Inn to smoke and converse on the great day that marked the beginning of a new era for the village and country about, someone asked for the Captain. Nobody had seen him. Bud passed a few minutes after and Ryan shouted to him:

"If you come across Captain Grennard, tell him we'd like him to spend the evening with us."

"All right," replied Bud, but he hastened his pace for fear he might be detained.

A little further he saw too familiar figures following the trail that led to the brow of Blue Hill. He paused for one second then he smiled and quickly turned up the road that led to the Birsches home.

The Captain and Virginia were taking one of their old-time strolls. Somehow their easy manner suggested less strenuous days and all along their path they were reminded of evidences of comfort. They stopped and watched the splash of the sunlight against window panes in the village. The engine that had driven the drill straight through the stone helmet that covered the bed of ore was motionless and its wheezing silent. The weather being pleasant, many of the inhabitants squatted on their doorsteps, and a lull of peacefulness, broken only by the rumbling of a few farm wagons in the distance, rested over the scene.

Up there with the lovers, the world was spread before their animated vision, beautiful and glorious. Virginia never till then dreamed that an hour so charged with the pulsations of love's enchantment could come to any mortal. Yet they were just walking and talking. The Captain had read a letter from old Basil, in which he stated that there was a good deal of advertisement going on in the papers for one Paul Grennard, or his

heirs, who had fallen heirs to a pretty chateau near Paris. Basil's people in France, had known the Grennards and knew the *avocats* who had charge of their estate. The last that was heard of Paul Grennard, he had left for St. Louis. Would Jean, his old friend asked as a favor, advertise in the Missourian papers, or make inquiries in St. Louis? They both laughed softly while Virginia, in default of other flowers, plucked negroheads and grasses and made them into a bouquet. Soon, they were talking freely of other visits to the hill top. There was nothing unusual about their intercourse, nevertheless they thrilled with delight. Suddenly, in some inexplicable manner Virginia's bunch of flowers came loose and dropped to the ground. They both stooped to pick them up and as they bunched them up once more their hands came in contact. François grasped Virginia's soft palms and pressed them to his face. Where the flowers fell once more to the earth there they lay forgotten.

In her surprise Virginia arose, and François half fearing he had offended her stood hesitating. Their eyes met a minute, but though they both tried to talk as they had done a short while before they ended by exchanging monosyllables and then they walked on in silence.

François drew Virginia's hand through his arm:

"Come just over the brow, Virginia, where we can look out on the wild South Country. I want to speak to you where we are quite alone."

A delight which neither tried to analyze gripped their hearts. They saw only each other though they climbed past the knoll and sat upon a great rock, velvety with clinging mosses, and down below the heads of pines and other trees blended in a solid mass of varied greens and russet.

"Virginia, since that night of the first dance at Dade's Inn, the time you went away to school, I have loved you, and that love has kept on growing until now. Dearest, I would have told you long ago, but you were not free—"

"Oh! Jean, do not speak of that! It was a terrible mistake! Please! don't!" She closed her eyes as if to shut out its vision. François put his arms around her.

"I know," he said simply. "We will never speak of it. But, dearest, it was not only you, I was not free. The mystery about my father's past—"

It was her turn to silence him, and love dictated the method.

The moon had risen. Jean and Virginia descended the trail to the village but before they left the quiet, unfrequented path Jean spoke:

"Virginia, in my happiness,—and selfishness—I've forgotten the time-honored customs: Will you be my wife, the heart of my soul, the spirit of my mind? My sweetheart always?"

A second later he was kissing her lips after receiving her answer.

As they proceeded Virginia playfully said:

"This haint the same valley where we'uns used to gather hazel-nuts. I don't see none her-bouts. When I was a little gal, runnin' up an' down this trail, I never thought I'd marry the Master of Bonne Terre's son." And she laughed as when she was a simple backwoods girl.

"Hello there!" came up to them from the valley, and looking down they described Bud and Flora making frantic gestures for them to hurry along.

As soon as they got within speaking distance, Flora cried: "Virgie! Virgie!" and ran to her friend.

She put her arms around her in her impulsive way. Then holding her away from her she looked straight into her eyes.

"Bud! I bet it is so! I bet it is so!" she cried excitedly.

"What?" asked Virginia, but the tell-tale look of happiness that stole into her eyes as François came up, fully convinced Flora.

"My dear, you and I always do the same thing at the same time. I'm engaged to Bud and I'll bet anything you're engaged to the Captain!"

The couples exchanged congratulations. Bud spoke:

"I suppose, Captain, it's up to us to get the buggies now," and he laughed.

A few minutes later the two couples came up, smiling, on Silas and his wife who were returning to the Inn.

The old man's native shrewdness toyed a few seconds with the significance of that "promonade", and he caused Mrs. Dade to stop while he squared himself in the road and bit off a fresh chew of "terbacky."

The young people stopped to discover the cause of the interrupted walk. They looked questioningly at the old man.

"By hanky, I knowed you'ns all listen to old Si, bye and bye. Howamsoiver, you boys was so slow I thought I'd have to do the sparkin'. But's all well that en's well. Them Yankees is all right fer the mines an' such like, but shucks—you gals knows what's from what. You'ns did jist what I knowed you'd do."

THE END.

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